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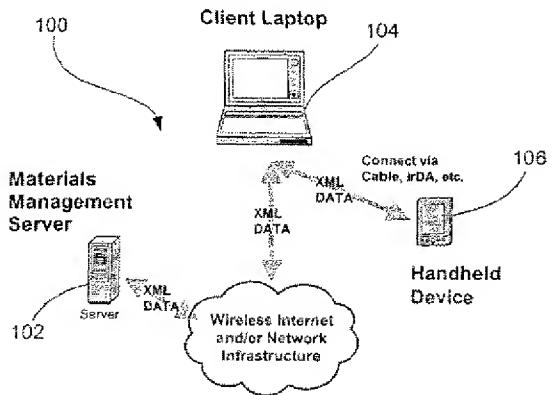
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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TRACKING CAPABILITIES



(57) Abstract: A comprehensive method and system is provided for managing bulk and non-bulk material and assets using radio frequency and other asset identification devices, distributed mobile computing systems, centralized data storage environments, and client-server based computing. In particular, a process has been designed and to manage shipment items from businesses and third parties to customer designated locations. Components of this system include electronic asset identification devices, a central data repository, a mobile computing environment and associated software applications supporting a client-server system or n-tiered computer system. The mobile computing environment includes software which enables users to physically locate assets, view asset information, and modify such information to reflect current asset status. This information may then be exchanged and synchronized across the n-tiered computer system. Additionally, various personnel associated with the shipping arrangement may have access to the available information over a computer network such as the Internet. In this manner, such personnel can easily determine the status of various shipments and also promptly act on information collected during any status updates, thereby expediting the resolution of any potential exceptions which may arise.

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING ASSET MANAGEMENT
AND TRACKING CAPABILITIES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to systems and methods for managing the flow of physical assets between various entities. More particularly, the present invention relates to methods and systems which utilize various computer technologies to create and maintain an up-to-date record of asset status and location information which may then be 5 shared among various personnel.

Maintaining an accurate and current record of shipment deliveries and status information has long been an area of significant frustration for businesses that ship large numbers of products or materials to a variety of customer locations. Conventionally, such shipping and delivery record keeping involved following a paper trail relating to the 10 shipment and delivery of the particular item in question. Unfortunately, much of the paperwork required to maintain the accuracy of the record, is often either missing, late, or erroneously completed. Additionally, information regarding the status of the delivered items is typically not included in such information.

One method for enhancing the ability of shippers to maintain accurate records, 15 involves the placement of unique computer-readable identification codes, e.g., bar codes, on each product shipment. By scanning in these codes at various waypoints during delivery, a record of the shipment process may be maintained. This information may then be forwarded to a shared database for subsequent access by authorized parties. Unfortunately, this process requires the affirmative step of locating and scanning in each 20 identification code in a timely manner. Further, this process does not assist product recipients in determining the location and status of their received deliveries.

Alternatively, container tracking methodologies have been developed which monitor shipments more automatically and continuously. Such systems may utilize 25 sophisticated GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) systems as well as other electronic technology to obtain real-time data on in-transit locations. In addition to such shipment tracking systems, systems are also in place which enable monitoring and management of the various inventory systems. Armed with accurate and up-to-date information, inventory management systems allow businesses to easily determine the extent of their inventories. Unfortunately, such real-time systems are often prohibitively expensive to

implement, particularly where large numbers of items are included in each shipment. Further, as with the code scanning systems described above, these methods likewise fail to provide information regarding the status of the delivered goods.

For example, in a typical sale and shipment of goods transaction, a carrier may
5 know from a satellite tracking system that a container has reached a factory or job site, but does not know if the container included damaged goods or otherwise unacceptable goods. Further, although the shipment has in fact been received, this knowledge is limited to the carrier and the personnel actually receiving the shipment. Additional personnel also having need of this knowledge are unaware of the delivery.

10 In addition to the relatively simple scenarios laid out above, certain additional circumstances may also exist which require accurate knowledge of both shipment location and status information in a timely manner. For example, there exist circumstances in which a supplier is required to deliver material purchased under a purchase agreement to customer designated sites at specified times. To fulfill these
15 contractual obligations the supplier manufactures and ships or purchases through third parties material necessary for the fulfillment of the contracts. In these instances it is imperative that the supplier maintain a logistics organization capable of coordinating the shipment of material from themselves and the various third party vendors so as to avoid a failure to meet their contractual obligations. This logistics activity requires the timely
20 tracking of materials from point of shipment to destination. Additionally, detailed information regarding the material subsequent to its delivery is also required for providing expedited remedies to any delivery exceptions which may arise. This information may include such items as material description, quantity, vendor, purchasing information, and the like.

25 To address these known problems, past attempts have utilized radio frequency identification (RFID) devices to track retail goods for asset security. A secondary use of such RFID devices has been for the near-real time tracking of material location. These
30 RFID devices have been tracked using both fixed 'reader' systems, wherein a reader identifies devices within a predetermined proximity to the reader. Additionally, man- portable RFID reading hardware has also been utilized, wherein the reader may be physically moved through a plurality of assets having RFID tags affixed thereto, for example, in a laydown yard or warehouse, or within range of such tagged assets. Unfortunately, existing solutions have failed to provide a sufficiently robust and cost- effect solution to the above problems.

Accordingly, there is a need in the art of asset management and tracking systems for a method and system for enabling the tracking of materials in an automated and cost-effective fashion from its point of shipment to its point of delivery. Additionally, there is also a need for a method and system which, in addition to material shipment and tracking information, also provides more detailed information. Additionally, there is a need for a method and system for enabling the identification of specific materials among a plurality of materials. There also remains a need in the art for systems and methods for providing asset management and tracking information in a manner suitable for use by reduced resources computer systems. Further, there is also a need for a method and system for enabling the monitoring and exchange of environment and operating condition information.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the problems noted above, and provides additional advantages, by providing a comprehensive method and system for managing bulk and non-bulk material and assets using radio frequency and other asset identification devices, distributed mobile computing systems, centralized data storage environments, and n-tiered based computing, such as client-server systems. In particular, a novel process has been designed to manage shipment items from businesses and third parties to customer designated locations. Components of this system include electronic asset identification devices, a central data repository, a mobile computing environment and associated software applications supporting a client-server or n-tiered computing system.

In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, the various system components are electronically linked together to transmit and receive data associated with tracked asset material. Typical data tracked may include material identification information, a description of the material, purchasing details, storage and maintenance details, and material location and destination information.

In accordance with a second embodiment of the present invention, the central data repository is further electronically linked with a plurality of legacy database systems for maintaining the accuracy of information on such systems in view of the ascertained shipping information. In this manner, information is collected from various disparate systems and is synchronized together through interaction with the central data repository and mobile computing environments.

In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, the mobile computer environment includes software which enables on-site users to physically locate

asset material, view specific asset information, and modify this information to accurately reflect the current status of the asset. Further, the mobile computing environment may then be linked with the central data repository over the n-tiered computing system to synchronize the data across all systems.

5 In accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention, various personnel associated with the shipping arrangement may have access to the available information over a computer network such as the Internet. In this manner, such personnel can easily determine the status of various shipments and also promptly act on information collected during any status updates, thereby expediting the resolution of any potential 10 exceptions that may arise.

 In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, electronic asset management devices may be further configured to include various types of sensors. These devices may then operate to process and store sensor output information for subsequent relay to users via the mobile computing environment or other means. 15 Additionally, such intelligent sensing devices may be further utilized to independently relay environmental and operating conditions information in a wireless manner, thereby creating a virtual network of intelligent sensing devices, the outputs of which may be collectively analyzed.

20 In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, database management features are implemented wherein the database of information exchanged and synchronized with the handheld computer and the material management database is minimized in size and structure so as to enable efficient operation in a field environment.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

25 The present invention can be understood more completely by reading the following Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments, in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

 FIG. 1 is a generalized block diagram illustrating an asset and materials management system configured in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

30 FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating a second, more specialized, embodiment of the asset management system of the present invention.

 FIG. 3 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network such as the Internet.

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network such as the Internet specially configured for website administrative level personnel.

5 FIG. 5 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network relating specifically to project site material handling personnel.

10 FIG. 6 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network relating specifically to supplier-side exception resolution personnel.

FIG. 7 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network relating specifically to supplier-side project team personnel.

15 FIG. 8 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network relating specifically to customer-side project site management personnel.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network relating specifically to customer-side high level management personnel.

20 FIG. 10 is a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a handheld device application for use with the present invention.

FIG. 11 is one embodiment of a handheld device asset information screen.

FIG. 12 is one embodiment of a handheld device auto scan results screen.

FIG. 13 is one embodiment of a handheld device smart search criteria screen.

25 FIG. 14 is one embodiment of a handheld device asset confirmation screen.

FIG. 15 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of an intelligent asset management device.

FIG. 16 is one embodiment of a handheld device's display screen configured to display sensor information received from an intelligent asset management device.

30 FIG. 17 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a method for receiving assets configured to include the intelligent asset management device of FIG. 10.

FIG. 18 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of an alternative method for utilizing the intelligent asset management device of FIG. 10.

FIG. 19 is a network diagram illustrating one embodiment of an information network created by a plurality of asset management devices and readers configured in accordance with the present invention.

5 FIG. 20 is a generalized block diagram illustrating another embodiment of an asset management system.

FIG. 21 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a method for creating a handheld computer database.

FIG. 22 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a method for filtering data from the asset management database.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

10 Referring now to the Figures and, more particularly, to FIG. 1, there is shown a generalized block diagram illustrating an asset and materials management system 100 configured in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. In particular, at its most simplistic implementation, the inventive asset and materials management system 100 includes at least an asset management server computer system 102, a remote client computer system 104, and at least one interrogation device 106 (either handheld or fixed).
15 In addition, each item or asset to be managed also includes an electronic asset identification device such as an RFID device (not shown).

20 During implementation of one embodiment of the present system, RFID devices, or tags, are affixed at the point of shipment to each asset (for example, crates, storage or packing containers, or the like) that is to be tracked. An electronic association is made between each RFID tag and the material being shipped which is then transmitted in an automated fashion to the asset management server computer system 102. As material moves from point of shipment to its destination, updates along its route and at site may be recorded automatically and remotely through the interrogation of the RFID devices either 25 with fixed or mobile radio frequency interrogators (readers) 106 and association of these ID's with status events (e.g. at port, arrival at site, etc). This information is then typically shared with client computer system 104 and updates on the status or disposition of material may then be transmitted in a hard-wired or wireless mode back to the asset management server computer system 102. Detailed information related to the material 30 being tracked may be obtained through querying a client-server type system or via a mobile computing device which both access the asset management server computer system 102.

One element of the present solution is the use of electronic asset identification devices such as RFID's to track asset material. These devices may be programmed prior to use or during use. Such programming may include association of the devices with an electronic identification code which may be alphanumeric in character. These devices are 5 constructed to transmit this code as well as other information when requested from specifically designed RFID interrogators (readers). As briefly set forth above, these readers may be used in either a fixed or mobile environment. Once devices with electronically coded ID's are associated with material to be tracked other associated data may be tracked along with material shipment tracking data using a centralized or 10 distributed data repository. This data when packaged in an organized fashion may be viewed and modified via mobile computing devices which also may be enabled to interact with the asset identification devices. These devices may then directly or indirectly synchronize these updates with the asset management server computer system 102 using either wireless or hard-wired communication systems.

15 In addition to viewing via the mobile computing devices, the present system also provides for the seamless viewing and modification of data associated with tracking, identification and use of material by additional client computer systems (not shown) electronically connected to the asst management server computer system via a computer network. Updates to material data may be viewed in a near-real time environment due to 20 the connection of mobile computing systems to the asset management server computer system. The electronic asset identification devices provide for a remote, automated means for tracking and updating the status of material.

25 As will be described in additional detail below, a 'Materials Management' web application for interfacing with the above-described asset management information is accessible to designated personnel. Further, updates to the asset management server computer system may be accomplished through the use of a mobile handheld computing platform and specifically designed software package called 'TagDetect'.

The asset management server computer system 102 may be or include, for 30 instance, a workstation running the Microsoft WindowsTM NTTM, WindowsTM 2000, WindowsTM XPTM, Unix, Linux, Xenix, IBM AIXTM, Hewlett-Packard UXTM, Novell NetwareTM, Sun Microsystems SolarisTM, OS/2TM, BeOSTM, Mach, Apache, OpenStepTM or other suitable operating system or platform. In operation, the asset management server computer system 102, executes at least one web server application conventionally known as an HTTPd server. In addition, the asset management server computer system 102

preferably provides local storage for at least one, though typically many, web pages as files in HTML format, XML (eXtensible Markup Language) format and/or other formats.

Also, asset management server computer system 102 may include several individual server computers or database computers positioned at various locations on the network.

5 Client computer system 104 may include, for instance, a personal computer running the Microsoft Windows™ 95, 98, Millenium™, NT™, XP™, or 2000, Windows™CE™, PalmOS™, Unix, Linux, Solaris™, OS/2™, BeOS™, MacOS™ or any other operating system or platform. Client computer system 104 may also include a microprocessor such as an Intel x86-based device, a Motorola 68K or PowerPC™ device,
10 a MIPS, Hewlett-Packard Precision™, or Digital Equipment Corp (DEC) Alpha™ RISC processor, a microcontroller or other general or special purpose device operating under programmed control. Furthermore, client computer system 104 may include electronic memory such as RAM (random access memory) or EPROM (electronically
15 programmable read only memory), storage devices such as a hard drive, CDROM or writable/rewritable CDROM, DVDROM or writeable/rewritable DVDROM or other magnetic, optical or other media, and other associated components connected over an electronic bus, as will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art. Client computer system 104 may also include a network-enabled appliance such as a WebTV™ unit, radio-enabled Palm™ Pilot or similar unit, a set-top box, a networkable game-playing
20 console such as Sony Playstation™ or Playstation 2™, Microsoft X-Box™, Nintendo GameCube™, or Sega Dreamcast™, a browser-equipped cellular telephone, or other TCP/IP enabled client or other device.

25 The interrogation device 106 may include a handheld computer such as a Palm™ Pilot, Compaq iPAQ, Sony Clie, Handspring Visor, Research in Motion Blackberry, or similar device operating on the Windows CE or Palm OS operating systems to transmit and receive radio frequency signals to and from the electronic asset identification devices. Additionally, interrogation device 106 may also include a specialized stand-alone fixed reading device.

30 Suitable computer networks for use in conjunction with the present invention may include or interface with any one or more of, for instance, an local intranet, a PAN (Personal Area Network), a LAN (Local Area Network), a WAN (Wide Area Network), a MAN (Metropolitan Area Network), a virtual private network (VPN), a storage area network (SAN), a frame relay connection, an Advanced Intelligent Network (AIN) connection, a synchronous optical network (SONET) connection, a digital T1, T3, E1 or

E3 line, Digital Data Service (DDS) connection, DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) connection, an Ethernet connection, an ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) line, a dial-up port such as a V.90, V.92, V.34 or V.34bis analog modem connection, a cable modem, an ATM (Asynchronous Transfer Mode) connection, or an FDDI (Fiber 5 Distributed Data Interface) or CDDI (Copper Distributed Data Interface) connection.

Furthermore, the computer network may also include links to any of a variety of wireless networks, including WAP (Wireless Application Protocol), GPRS (General 10 Packet Radio Service), GSM (Global System for Mobile Communication), CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access) or TDMA (Time Division Multiple Access), cellular phone networks, GPS (Global Positioning System), CDPD (cellular digital packet data), RIM (Research in Motion, Limited) duplex paging network, Bluetooth radio, an IEEE 15 802.11x-based radio frequency network, or an HPNA (Home Phoneline Networking Alliance) compliant ethernet network. Computer network may yet further include or interface with any one or more of an RS-232 serial connection, an IEEE-1394 (Firewire™) connection, a Fibre Channel connection, an IrDA (infrared) port, a SCSI (Small Computer Systems Interface) connection, a USB (Universal Serial Bus) connection or other wired or wireless, digital or analog interface or connection.

In general operation, the client computer system requests a web page by issuing a URL request through the network to the server system 102. A URL consistent with the 20 present invention may be a simple URL of the form:

<protocol_identifier>://<server_path>/<web_page_path>

The protocol identifier “http” specifies the conventional hypertext transfer protocol, 25 however other suitable protocol identifiers may be implemented. For example, a URL request for a secure network communication session typically utilizes the secure protocol identifier “https,” assuming that the client browser and web server each support and implement the secure sockets layer (SSL). The “server_path” is typically of the form “prefix.domain,” where the prefix may be “www” to designate a web server and the “domain” is the standard network sub-domain.top-level-domain of the server system 106. The optional “web_page_path” is provided to specifically identify a particular hyper-text 30 page maintained by the asset management server computer system 102.

In response to a received URL identifying an existing web page, the asset management server system 102 returns the web page, subject to the HTTP protocol, to the client computer system 104. This web page typically incorporates both textual and graphical information including embedded hypertext links, commonly referred to as

hyperlinks that permit the client user to readily select a next URL for issuance to the computer network. In this manner a plurality of individual web pages may be grouped into a comprehensive web site.

The URL issued from the client computer system 104 may also be of a complex 5 form that identifies a common gateway interface (CGI) program on a server system 106. Such a HTML hyperlink reference may take the form:

```
<form action= "http://www.vendor.com/cgi-bin/logon.cgi" method=post>
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A hypertext link of this form directs the execution of the logon.cgi program or script on the server system in response to a client-side selection of the associated hyperlink. A 10 logon form supported by a logon CGI program is typically used to obtain a client user login name and password to initiate an authenticated session between the client browser and web server for purposes of supporting, for example, an exchange of secure or otherwise privileged information. Further, web site privileges may be managed by referencing the information received during such a logon request, thereby enabling the 15 specific tailoring of the site to a unique individual or class of individuals.

Referring now to FIG. 2, a block diagram illustrates a second, more specialized, embodiment 200 of the asset management system of the present invention. In particular, the asset management system of FIG. 2 includes 3 main areas: an initial asset information area 202; a web application area 204; and a project site area 206. Each of these areas play 20 a role in the overall system and interact with each other through various computer network topologies.

Referring now specifically to the initial asset information area 202, a tagging computer system 208 is provided which includes at least RFID tag writing software for 25 formatting RFID tags prior to placement on the various assets to be tracked. In one embodiment, this computer system 208 is preferably networked to existing legacy databases 209 for retrieving specific information regarding the various assets to incorporate within their respective RFID tags, such as the project information in which the asset is to be used, as well as other information regarding the asset in question, such as forecast information, storage requirements, etc.. Further, in another embodiment, 30 when a single tag is used to identify several shipped items, computer system 208 may also operate to transmit an electronic packing list both to the RFID tag as well as the web application area 204. Additional details regarding this embodiment will be set forth in additional detail below.

A tag writer device 210 is the operatively connected to the computer system 208 for writing the information formatted by the computer system 208 onto the RFID tag 212. This tag 212 is then secured to the associated asset 214 using any suitable means, such as adhesives or the like. Once the RFID tag 212 has been secured to the asset 214, the asset 5 is placed then shipped to the site destination by any desired means. It should be understood that the initial asset information area encompasses both internal and third party shipping procedures. Of course, where the shipment originates from a third party, the connection to legacy databases may be different, depending upon how information included within the RFID tag is generated. Regardless, information regarding the RFID 10 tag identification information and packing list data is exchanged with the web application area 204 for inclusion within that system. In one embodiment, data transfer between the initial asset information area 202 and the web application area 204 is accomplished via ftp (file transfer protocol) transfer.

As briefly described above, once information has been shared between the tag 15 writing computer system 208 and the web application area 204, this information is made available for viewing and modification via a web application available over the Internet or other suitable computer network. Additionally, once data transfer between legacy database systems 209 and the web application area 204 has been accomplished specific information regarding the various tracked assets and the projects of which they are a part 20 are also available over the computer network.

In the illustrated embodiment, the web application area 204 includes several elements. Initially, all RFID tag, asset and project information is received and stored within a materials management database system 216. This information is then made available to a web application server 218 and connected HTTP server 220 for 25 dissemination over the computer network. As will be described in additional detail below, the web application and HTTP servers provide this information in a user-specific manner utilizing a plurality of interactive web pages. Further, it should be understood that the web application server's connection to the materials management database system 216 is bi-directional. That is, asset management information which is updated via 30 the web application server, via the interactive web application either directly or by way of the handheld computing device described in detail below, is correspondingly written to the materials management database system, for subsequent retrieval by later users.

Optionally, as illustrated, the web application may also include an authentication server 222 with access to an LDAP directory system 224 for facilitation of login and

authentication of users. In conjunction with such a system, different web application functionality may be afforded to different users, depending upon their login information.

Turning now to the project site area 206, interaction with site personnel enables up to date information regarding the tracked asset to be easily determined and uploaded to the web application and materials management database systems for review over the computer network. In particular, once the tracked asset 214 having the RFID 212 affixed thereto is received at the site, information regarding the asset may be uploaded to the web application area 204 by site personnel in a variety of ways, such as direct web entry and handheld synchronization. Initially, a handheld device 226, such as a device running the Windows CE or Palm OS operating systems, is provided with RFID tag reading capabilities, typically by adding both a hardware module and a corresponding software application. Utilizing the handheld device 226 and software application, asset handlers are able to either affirmatively read information from a located asset or locate an asset included within a plurality of tagged assets.

Once the asset has been located, additional information regarding the status of the asset may be entered into the handheld device application for future upload to the web application area 204. The entry of this information is simplified by the GUI on the device 226 which specifically enables input of various information, such as asset receipt, maintenance information, as well as other asset specific and project data. Additional details and specific embodiments of the handheld device application will be set forth in detail below, in reference to FIG. 10.

Next, during synchronization with a connected on-site computer system 228, information on the device 226 regarding the asset or assets located and updated is added and/or synchronized with information contained within the on-site computer system 228. In a preferred embodiment, this information is exchanged in the form of an XML file, for providing easy parsing of data included therein by the web application area 204 upon upload although additional data formats such as comma delimited (separated) values, or any other suitable data format.

Once information has been synchronized between the handheld device 226 and the on-site computer system 228, the information also needs to be synchronized between the on-site computer system 228 and the web application area 204. This process is completed upon login by the site personnel to the web application server system 218. Upon access and authentication by the authentication server 222, the user is provided with the option to synchronize their data with the web site. Accordingly, the information

5 synchronized between the on-site computer system 228 and the handheld device 226 is uploaded to the web application server 218 and subsequently to the materials management database system 216 for both relay to legacy systems and viewing or modification via the web application. Additionally, as set forth briefly above, project site personnel may also have the option of directly entering asset status information into the web application without performing a synchronization. This enables site personnel without access to a suitable handheld device to also perform easy status updates. In addition, file exchange between the web application and the client computer or handheld device may also be encrypted using known encryption techniques such as public key 10 encryption, message hashing, or the like so as to ensure that data transmitted therebetween is not intercepted by unauthorized parties.

In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, different access to the web application is provided based upon the type of user logging in to the application. Types of users may include internal business administration personnel; on-site material handler personnel; exception resolution personnel; business personnel; on-site customer management personnel; and customer headquarters personnel. Differences 15 between application access and privileges will be described for each of these types in additional detail below.

20 Referring now to FIG. 3, there is shown a flow diagram schematically illustrating one embodiment of a generalized method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network such as the Internet. In the diagram below, each step on the described process indicates a decision made by users visiting the website maintained by web application area 204, described in detail above. Initially, upon entry 25 of a URL associated with the web application area's website, a home page 300 is displayed to the user. Prior to logging in to obtain access to specific asset information, users may select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a contact page 302 for facilitating communication with the website operators. Upon user login (which may be selected from either the home page or any of the administrative pages), a main menu 304 is displayed to the user which includes various options relating to the display and 30 modification of asset management information. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the web application area utilizes information provided during user login to determine the various options available to the users. In this manner, users are directed toward information that they are authorized to view.

Of the options provided to users, the present embodiment includes options to search records by both specific asset number as well as by project. Additionally, when viewing projects, users are given the option of whether to view the project details or search for assets within the project. It should be understood that projects relate to collections of assets regarding identified customer operations, e.g., a power plant generator, etc. For this example, the project may include a listing of all assets in the generator. Additionally, projects may also include a unit sub-category, wherein various units make up the project, with each unit having various assets.

In response to a user selection of a select project option, a project details page 306 is displayed. This page provides users with information regarding the project as well as options to search for assets in the project, list the project assets by unit, and view a unit status page 307. In response to a user selection of a search for project assets, either from the main menu 304 or from the project details page 306, an asset search form 308 is displayed to the user, wherein search criteria regarding the asset may be entered. In response to a submission of this form, an asset search results page 310 is displayed itemizing the various assets which match the submitted criteria.

From this point, users have three options, they may return to the project details page 306, view details for selected asset in page 312, or confirm or reject receipt of an identified asset in a form on page 314. Regarding the asset details page 312, once users have viewed the current details and status of the asset, they have the option of continuing to the asset receipt confirmation form 314 or viewing additional details associated with the asset, such as a packing list details page 316 or a storage/maintenance requirements page 318. Regarding the asset receipt confirmation or rejection form on page 314, users complete and submit the form indicating either receipt confirmation or rejection of the asset. If the asset has been received and accepted, a receipt confirmation page 320 is displayed. However, if an asset has been rejected, an asset rejection form 322 is displayed for enabling users to indicate the reason for the rejection, thereby creating an exception in the asset management system. Confirmation of this asset exception is then displayed to the user in page 324. Once the identified asset has been either accepted or rejected, the user may return to the asset details page 312 and from there, the user may return to the project details page 306 to select additional assets for review.

Referring now to FIGS. 4-9, there are shown flow diagrams schematically illustrating several additional embodiments of a method for sharing and accessing asset tracking information over a computer network such as the Internet. As described above,

depending upon the identity of a user, various privileges and site accesses are provided, thereby changing the overall content of the site for different types of users. Accordingly, each of FIGS. 4-9 depict the inventive method for a plurality of different types of user. FIG. 4 relates specifically to website administrative level personnel with access to virtually all potential areas of the website. FIG. 5 relates specifically to website access provided to project site material handling personnel (e.g., shipment receiving personnel, etc.); FIG. 6 relates specifically to supplier-side exception resolution personnel, for enabling access to asset exceptions and other project/asset information; FIG. 7 relates specifically to supplier-side project team business; FIG. 8 relates specifically to customer-side project site management personnel; and FIG. 9 relates specifically to customer-side high level management personnel.

Referring now specifically to FIG. 4, the present embodiment includes additional options specifically relating to the synchronization process described above and available to website administrative level users. However, as above, upon entry of a URL associated with the web application area's website, a home page 400 is displayed to the administrative user. Again, several options are available to administrative users at this time. Prior to logging in to obtain access to user-specific asset information, administrative users may select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a help page 402, a sitemap 404, showing the layout of the website, a contact page 406 for facilitating communication with the website operators, and a feedback form 408 and associated submission page 410. From either the home page 400 or any of the administrative pages 402-410, administrative users may choose to login to the site. In response to this selection, a login form 412 is provided to the administrative user for receiving login information, such as, e.g., a username and password combination. Subsequently, the information is received and processed in the manner briefly described above to determine the level of site access the administrative user is afforded. If the login information is determined to be inaccurate, an appropriate error message page 414 prompting reentry of the information is displayed. Following entry of appropriate login information, a main menu 416 is displayed to the administrative user including several options including a synchronize option; a view reports option, a search by asset number or RFID tag number option, and a select project option.

Relating specifically to the synchronize option, administrative level users are provided with the authority to synchronize asset management information between the website and a remote client computer system in the manner set forth in detail above. In

information regarding the content of asset receipt page 442 and asset details page 444 will be described in additional detail below.

Returning to the main menu 416, users can also search for asset management information by selecting an available project. Upon selection of this option, a listing of 5 available projects is displayed in page 446. From this location, users may chose to view project-level detail information in page 448 including a listing of all assets associated with the selected project, search for assets included within the project in page 450 and display a listing of asset exceptions for a selected project in page 452. Turning 10 specifically to page 448, once project-level detail information is displayed for a selected project, users have several options available for displaying additional information. Initially, they may choose to display the asset search page 450 for further narrowing the 15 number of available assets, or the asset exception listing page 452 described above. Additionally, users have the option of selecting a particular asset or collection of assets and viewing this information in the various formats described in pages 434-440. Further, 20 from the project details page 448, users also have the option of viewing project-level forecast information as well as status information for various units included in the project on page 453. Regarding the forecast information, upon selection of this option, a material list forecast page 454 is displayed which includes various forecast information relating to the number of assets are associated with the project, the size of the assets, etc. At this point, a selection to view asset-specific forecast information is also provided. Upon this selection, an asset forecast page 456 is displayed.

Returning to the asset search form in page 450, upon selection of this page from either the project select page or the project details page, information regarding the 25 particular asset or assets requested is submitted. At this point, a decision to export information for all matching assets to an external spreadsheet application may be made in page 458. Otherwise, upon submission of the asset search form on page 450, resulting asset information is displayed in a variety of formats as set forth above regarding pages 434-440.

Returning now to page 442 relating to the receipt/rejection of assets, users at this 30 point may choose to either confirm receipt of an asset in page 460 or enter an acceptance exception. If the asset is received without exception, the user is simply returned to the asset search results page (434-440). However, if an exception is to be entered, an asset exception annotation page 462 is displayed to the user. At this point, the user enters the exception information and submits the information in page 464. If the exception relates

particular, by selecting the synchronize option from the main menu page 416, a synchronize select form 418 is displayed, wherein information regarding the information to be synchronized is submitted. This information should include at least a local file location for the XML file discussed above which is then uploaded to the website. Next, 5 upon submission of a completed form 418, an electronic mail message 420 is generated which confirms the synchronization process.

Returning to the main menu 416, an administrative user may also select a view reports option. Selection of this option results in the display of a report menu page 422 which includes a listing of available reports, including an exception report and a 10 maintenance report. If the user selects the exception report option, a create exception report page 424 is displayed and preferably includes options regarding the format and content of the generated exception report. Once selections have been made, the generated exception report is displayed to the user in page 426. Additional details regarding any exception listed in the report is then available in page 428.

15 If the user selects the maintenance report option, a create maintenance report page 430 is displayed and preferably also includes options regarding the format and content of the generated maintenance report. Maintenance reports are then generated to the various asset management information which has been collected regarding any required or suggested maintenance performed on any assets. Once selections have been made, the 20 generated maintenance report is displayed to the user in page 432.

Returning to the main menu 416, the administrative user may also choose to view project or asset specific information in a variety of manners. Initially, the user may choose to simply input an asset identification number or RFID tag number and view the asset(s) associated with that number. In a preferred embodiment, this number may be 25 entered directly on the main menu 416. Submission of this number then results in display of the corresponding assets in a variety of formats including a default format in page 434, a logistics format in page 436, a customer format in page 438 and a inventory format in page 440. Additionally, transition between any available format is easily made from any other format results. Once the asset search results have been displayed, users then have 30 the ability to accept or reject a listed asset in page 442, view additional information regarding a selected asset in page 444, or export the search results to an external spreadsheet application in the desired format in pages 435, 437, 439 and 441, wherein each of these pages correspond to a selected search results format. Additional

to a shortage in the received asset, a special circumstance is entered and a create asset shortage page 466 is displayed. Otherwise, the user is returned to the asset receipt page 442. If a shortage is created, additional information relating to the shortage is submitted in page 468 and the user may either return to the asset receipt form page 442 or, if the asset shortage is created after asset receipt, the user may proceed to the asset details page 444.

From the asset details page, users also have a variety of additional options, asset exceptions may be entered in page 462, assets may be received in page 442, asset location information may be modified or updated in page 472, asset storage maintenance details may be viewed in page 470, and asset packing list detail information may be viewed in page 474. Regarding the asset location page 470, upon display of this page, any modifications to the asset location are made and submitted in page 476. Regarding the asset storage maintenance details page 472, administrative users may also select to display and/or modify a maintenance log for the received asset. If so, a maintenance log page 480 is displayed showing the current status of the asset's maintenance log with options to create and or modify the displayed log. If log modification is desired, the user opens a modify maintenance log page 482 and submits any desired modifications. Similarly, if a new entry is to be created, the user selects a create option and opens a create maintenance log page 484, wherein information for the new entry is submitted.

Returning now to the asset exceptions listing page 452, users may select a listed exception and, for non-shortage exceptions, proceed to an asset exception details page 486. From this page, users may choose to resolve the selected asset exception. If so, a resolve asset exceptions page 478 is displayed. The user may then indicate that the exception has been resolved and return to the asset exception details page 486. For shortage exceptions, an asset shortage details page 488 is displayed. If the administrative user wishes to close the shortage, a close asset shortages page 490 is displayed, following the submission of which, the user is returned to the show asset exception list page 452.

By utilizing the collection of various interactive web pages described above, administrative users are easily able to update and view asset management information for every level of the website. Additionally, users are able to synchronize this data with data maintained on a remote client computer system.

Referring now specifically to FIG. 5 the present embodiment includes additional options specifically relating to the synchronization process described above and also options available to project site material handling personnel (e.g., shipment receiving

personnel, etc.). As above in FIGS. 3 and 4, upon entry of the URL associated with the web application area's website, a home page 500 is displayed to the material handling user. Again, several options are available to material handling users at this time. Prior to logging in to obtain access to user-specific asset information, material handling users may 5 select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a help page 502, a sitemap 504, showing the layout of the website, a contact page 506 for facilitating communication with the website operators, and a feedback form 508 and associated submission page 510. From either the home page 500 or any of the administrative pages 502-510, material handling users may choose to login to the site. In response to this selection, a login form 512 is 10 provided to the material handling user for receiving login information, such as, e.g., a username and password combination. Subsequently, the information is received and processed in the manner briefly described above to determine the level of site access the material handling user is afforded. If the login information is determined to be 15 inaccurate, an appropriate error message page 514 prompting reentry of the information is displayed. Following entry of appropriate login information, a main menu 516 is displayed to the material handling user including several options including a synchronize data option, a search by asset number or RFID tag number option, and a select project option.

Relating specifically to the synchronize option, material handling level users are 20 provided with the authority to synchronize asset management information between the website and a remote client computer system in the manner set forth in detail above. In particular, by selecting the synchronize option from the main menu page 516, a synchronize select form 518 is displayed, wherein information regarding the information to be synchronized is submitted. This information should include at least a local file 25 location for the XML file discussed above which is then uploaded to the website. As discussed above, this information may have been generated upon client synchronization between the remote client computer system and the material handler's handheld device. Next, upon submission of a completed form 518, an electronic mail message 520 is generated which confirms the synchronization process.

30 Returning to the main menu 516, the material handling user may also choose to view project or asset specific information in a variety of manners. Initially, the user may choose to simply input an asset identification number or RFID tag number and view the asset(s) associated with that number. In a preferred embodiment, this number may be entered directly on the main menu 516. Submission of this number then results in display

of the corresponding assets in a variety of formats including a default format in page 534, a logistics format in page 536, and a inventory format in page 538. Additionally, transition between any available format is easily made from any other format results.

5 Once the asset search results have been displayed, users then have the ability to accept or reject a listed asset in page 542, view additional information regarding a selected asset in page 544, or export the search results to an external spreadsheet application in the desired format in pages 535, 537, and 539, wherein each of these pages correspond to a selected search results format. Additional information regarding the content of asset receipt page 542 and asset details page 544 will be described in additional detail below.

10 Returning to the main menu 516, users can also search for asset management information by selecting an available project. Upon selection of this option, a listing of available projects is displayed in page 546. From this location, users may chose to view project-level detail information in page 548 including a listing of all assets associated with the selected project, search for assets included within the project in page 550 and 15 display a listing of asset exceptions for a selected project in step 552. Turning specifically to page 548, once project-level detail information is displayed for a selected project, users have several options available for displaying additional information.

Initially, they may choose to display the asset search page 550 for further narrowing the number of available assets, or the asset exception listing page 552 described above.

20 Additionally, users have the option of selecting a particular asset or collection of assets and viewing this information in the various formats described in pages 534-540. Further, from the project details page 548, users also have the option of viewing project-level forecast information as well as status information for various units included in the project. The unit status information is displayed on page 553. Regarding the forecast information, 25 upon selection of this option, a material list forecast page 554 is displayed which includes various forecast information relating to the number of assets are associated with the project, the size of the assets, etc. At this point, a selection to view asset-specific forecast information is also provided. Upon this selection, an asset forecast page 556 is displayed.

30 Returning to the asset search form in page 550, upon selection of this page from either the project select page or the project details page, information regarding the particular asset or assets requested is submitted. At this point, a decision to export information for all matching assets to an external spreadsheet application may be made in page 558. Otherwise, upon submission of the asset search form on page 550, resulting

asset information is displayed in a variety of formats as set forth above regarding pages 534-538.

5 Returning now to page 542 relating to the receipt/rejection of assets, users at this point may choose to either confirm receipt of an asset in page 560 or enter an acceptance exception. If the asset is received without exception, the user is simply returned to the asset search results page (534-538). However, if an exception is to be entered, an asset exception annotation page 562 is displayed to the user. At this point, the user enters the exception information and submits the information in page 564. If the exception relates to a shortage in the received asset, a special circumstance is entered and a create asset 10 shortage page 566 is displayed. Otherwise, the user is returned to the asset receipt page 542. If a shortage is created, additional information relating to the shortage is submitted in page 568 and the user may either return to the asset receipt page 542 or, if the shortage is created after asset receipt, the user may proceed to the asset details page 544.

15 From the asset details page, users also have a variety of additional options, asset exceptions may be entered in page 562, assets may be received in page 542, asset location information may be modified or updated in page 570, asset storage maintenance details may be viewed in page 570, and asset packing list detail information may be viewed in page 574. Regarding the asset location page 572, upon display of this page, any modifications to the asset location are made and submitted in page 576.

20 Returning now to the asset exceptions details page 552, users may select a listed exception and, for non-shortage exceptions, proceed to an asset exception details page 586. For shortage exceptions, an asset shortage details page 488 is displayed.

25 By limiting the available collection of interactive web pages described above, material handling users are easily able to update and view appropriate asset management information without accessing information which is outside the scope of their duties.

30 Referring now specifically to FIG. 6, the present embodiment relates specifically to website options available to supplier-side exception resolution level users. However, as above, upon entry of a URL associated with the web application area's website, a home page 600 is displayed to the supplier-side exception resolution user. Again, several options are available to supplier-side exception resolution users at this time. Prior to logging in to obtain access to user-specific asset information, supplier-side exception resolution users may select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a help page 602, a sitemap 604, showing the layout of the website, a contact page 606 for facilitating communication with the website operators, and a feedback form 608 and associated

submission page 610. From either the home page 600 or any of the administrative pages 602-610, supplier-side exception resolution users may choose to login to the site. In response to this selection, a login form 612 is provided to the supplier-side exception resolution user for receiving login information, such as, e.g., a username and password combination. Subsequently, the information is received and processed in the manner briefly described above to determine the level of site access the supplier-side exception resolution user is afforded. If the login information is determined to be inaccurate, an appropriate error message page 614 prompting reentry of the information is displayed. Following entry of appropriate login information, a main menu 616 is displayed to the supplier-side exception resolution user including several options including a search by asset number or RFID tag number option, and a select project option.

Relating specifically to the search by asset number or RFID tag number option, the user simply inputs an asset identification number or RFID tag number. In a preferred embodiment, this number may be entered directly on the main menu 616. Submission of this number then results in display of the corresponding assets in a variety of formats including a default format in page 634, a logistics format in page 636, and a inventory format in page 638. Additionally, transition between any available format is easily made from any other format results. Once the asset search results have been displayed, users then have the ability view additional information regarding a selected asset in page 644, or export the search results to an external spreadsheet application in the desired format in pages 635, 637, 639, wherein each of these pages correspond to a selected search results format. From the asset details page 644, users may also view asset packing list detail information in page 674.

Returning to the main menu 616, users can also search for asset management information by selecting an available project. Upon selection of this option, a listing of available projects is displayed in page 646. From this location, users may chose to view project-level detail information in page 648 including a listing of all assets associated with the selected project, search for assets included within the project in page 650 and display a listing of asset exceptions for a selected project in page 652. Turning specifically to page 648, once project-level detail information is displayed for a selected project, users have several options available for displaying additional information. Initially, they may choose to display the asset search page 650 for further narrowing the number of available assets, or may also select an asset exception listing page 652. This option is particular relevant for this particular type of user, since it is exception resolution

that they are most concerned with. Additionally, users have the option of selecting a particular asset or collection of assets and viewing this information in the various formats described in pages 634-638. Further, from the project details page 648, users also have the option of viewing project-level forecast information as well as status information for various units included in the project. Regarding the forecast information, upon selection of this option, a material list forecast page 654 is displayed which includes various forecast information relating to the number of assets are associated with the project, the size of the assets, etc. At this point, a selection to view asset-specific forecast information is also provided. Upon this selection, an asset forecast page 656 is displayed.

10 Returning to the asset search form in page 650, upon selection of this page from either the project select page or the project details page, information regarding the particular asset or assets requested is submitted. At this point, a decision to export information for all matching assets to an external spreadsheet application may be made in page 658. Otherwise, upon submission of the asset search form on page 650, resulting 15 asset information is displayed in a variety of formats as set forth above regarding pages 634-638.

20 Returning now to the asset exceptions details page 652, users may select a listed exception and, for non-shortage exceptions, proceed to an asset exception details page 686. From this page, users may choose to resolve the selected asset exception. If so, a resolve asset exceptions page 678 is displayed. The user may then indicate that the exception has been resolved and return to the asset exception details page 686. For shortage exceptions, an asset shortage details page 688 is displayed. Next, for the displayed shortage, the shortage condition may be closed in page 690. From this location, users may continue onto the asset details page 644.

25 By utilizing the collection of various interactive web pages described above tailored specifically to their needs, supplier-side exception resolution users are easily able to view and resolve asset exceptions as well as additional asset management information.

30 Referring now specifically to FIG. 7, the present embodiment includes additional options specifically relating to the supplier-side project team level users. Once again in the manner described above, upon entry of a URL associated with the web application area's website, a home page 700 is displayed to the supplier-side project team user. Again, several options are available to supplier-side project team users at this time. Prior to logging in to obtain access to user-specific asset information, supplier-side project team users may select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a help page 702, a

sitemap 704, showing the layout of the website, a contact page 706 for facilitating communication with the website operators, and a feedback form 708 and associated submission page 710. From either the home page 700 or any of the administrative pages 702-710, supplier-side project team users may choose to login to the site. In response to 5 this selection, a login form 712 is provided to the supplier-side project team user for receiving login information, such as, e.g., a username and password combination. Subsequently, the information is received and processed in the manner briefly described above to determine the level of site access the supplier-side project team user is afforded. If the login information is determined to be inaccurate, an appropriate error message page 10 714 prompting reentry of the information is displayed. Following entry of appropriate login information, a main menu 716 is displayed to the supplier-side project team user including several options including a synchronize option; a view reports option, a search by asset number or RFID tag number option, and a select project option.

Relating specifically to the view reports option, selection of this option results in 15 the display of a report menu page 722 which includes a listing of available reports, including an exception report and a maintenance report. If the user selects the exception report option, a create exception report page 724 is displayed and preferably includes options regarding the format and content of the generated exception report. Once 20 selections have been made, the generated exception report is displayed to the user in page 726. Additional details regarding any exception listed in the report is then available in page 728.

If the user selects the maintenance report option, a create maintenance report page 25 730 is displayed and preferably also includes options regarding the format and content of the generated maintenance report. Maintenance reports are then generated to the various asset management information which has been collected regarding any required or suggested maintenance performed on any assets. Once selections have been made, the generated maintenance report is displayed to the user in page 732.

Returning to the main menu 716, the supplier-side project team user may also 30 choose to view project or asset specific information in a variety of manners. Initially, the user may choose to simply input an asset identification number or RFID tag number and view the asset(s) associated with that number. In a preferred embodiment, this number may be entered directly on the main menu 716. Submission of this number then results in display of the corresponding assets in a variety of formats including a default format in page 734, a logistics format in page 736, and an inventory format in page 738.

Additionally, transition between any available format is easily made from any other format results. Once the asset search results have been displayed, users then have the ability to accept or reject a listed asset in page 742, view additional information regarding a selected asset in page 744, or export the search results to an external spreadsheet application in the desired format in pages 735, 737, and 739, wherein each of these pages correspond to a selected search results format. Additional information regarding the content of the asset details page 744 will be described in additional detail below.

Returning to the main menu 716, users can also search for asset management information by selecting an available project. Upon selection of this option, a listing of available projects is displayed in page 746. From this location, users may chose to view project-level detail information in page 748 including a listing of all assets associated with the selected project, search for assets included within the project in page 750 and display a listing of asset exceptions for a selected project in page 752. Turning specifically to page 748, once project-level detail information is displayed for a selected project, users have several options available for displaying additional information. Initially, they may choose to display the asset search page 750 for further narrowing the number of available assets, or the asset exception listing page 752 described above. Additionally, users have the option of selecting a particular asset or collection of assets and viewing this information in the various formats described in pages 734-738. Further, from the project details page 748, users also have the option of viewing project-level forecast information as well as status information for various units included in the project. Regarding the forecast information, upon selection of this option, a material list forecast page 754 is displayed which includes various forecast information relating to the number of assets are associated with the project, the size of the assets, etc. At this point, a selection to view asset-specific forecast information is also provided. Upon this selection, an asset forecast page 756 is displayed.

Returning to the asset search form in page 750, upon selection of this page from either the project select page or the project details page, information regarding the particular asset or assets requested is submitted. At this point, a decision to export information for all matching assets to an external spreadsheet application may be made in page 758. Otherwise, upon submission of the asset search form on page 750, resulting asset information is displayed in a variety of formats as set forth above regarding pages 734-738.

Turning now to the asset details page 744, several options are available to users at this point. If shortage information needs to be inserted for a specific asset, the user, from asset details page 742, selects the shortages option, resulting in display of the create asset shortage page 766. Next, additional information relating to the shortage is submitted in 5 page 768 and the user is returned to the asset details page 744. In addition, asset storage maintenance details may be viewed in page 770, and asset packing list detail information may be viewed in page 774 from the asset details page 744. Regarding the asset storage maintenance details page 770, supplier-side project team users may also select to display and/or modify a maintenance log for the received asset. If so, a maintenance log page 10 780 is displayed showing the current status of the asset's maintenance log with options to create and or modify the displayed log. If log modification is desired, the user opens a modify maintenance log page 782 and submits any desired modifications. Similarly, if a new entry is to be created, the user selects a create option and opens a create maintenance log page 784, wherein information for the new entry is submitted.

15 Returning now to the asset exceptions details page 752, users may select a listed exception and, for non-shortage exceptions, proceed to an asset exception details page 786. For shortage exceptions, an asset shortage details page 588 is displayed.

20 By utilizing the specific collection of various interactive web pages described above, supplier-side project team users are easily able to update and view asset management information for which they have responsibilities.

25 Referring now specifically to FIG. 8, the present embodiment includes additional options specifically relating to the synchronization process described above and available to customer-side project site management level users. However, as above, upon entry of a URL associated with the web application area's website, a home page 800 is displayed to the customer-side project site management user. Again, several options are available to customer-side project site management users at this time. Prior to logging in to obtain access to user-specific asset information, customer-side project site management users may select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a help page 802, a sitemap 804, showing the layout of the website, a contact page 806 for facilitating communication with 30 the website operators, and a feedback form 808 and associated submission page 810.

From either the home page 800 or any of the administrative pages 802-810, customer-side project site management users may choose to login to the site. In response to this selection, a login form 812 is provided to the customer-side project site management user for receiving login information, such as, e.g., a username and password combination.

Subsequently, the information is received and processed in the manner briefly described above to determine the level of site access the customer-side project site management user is afforded. If the login information is determined to be inaccurate, an appropriate error message page 814 prompting reentry of the information is displayed. Following 5 entry of appropriate login information, a main menu 816 is displayed to the customer-side project site management user including several options including a synchronize option, a search by asset number or RFID tag number option, and a select project option.

Relating specifically to the synchronize option, customer-side project site 10 management level users are provided with the authority to synchronize asset management information between the website and a remote client computer system in the manner set forth in detail above. In particular, by selecting the synchronize option from the main menu page 816, a synchronize select form 818 is displayed, wherein information regarding the information to be synchronized is submitted. This information should include at least a local file location for the XML file discussed above which is then 15 uploaded to the website. Next, upon submission of a completed form 818, an electronic mail message 820 is generated which confirms the synchronization process.

Returning to the main menu 816, the customer-side project site management user may also choose to view project or asset specific information in a variety of manners. 20 Initially, the user may choose to simply input an asset identification number or RFID tag number and view the asset(s) associated with that number. In a preferred embodiment, this number may be entered directly on the main menu 816. Submission of this number then results in display of the corresponding assets in a customer specialized format in page 838. Once the asset search results have been displayed, users then have the ability to accept or reject a listed asset in page 842, view additional information regarding a 25 selected asset in page 844, or export the search results to an external spreadsheet application in page 840. Additional information regarding the content of asset receipt page 842 and asset details page 844 will be described in additional detail below.

Returning to the main menu 816, users can also search for asset management 30 information by selecting an available project. Upon selection of this option, a listing of available projects is displayed in page 846. From this location, users may chose to view project-level detail information in page 848 including a listing of all assets associated with the selected project, search for assets included within the project in page 850. Turning specifically to page 848, once project-level detail information is displayed for a selected project, users have several options available for displaying additional

information. Initially, they may choose to display the asset search page 850 for further narrowing the number of available assets. Additionally, users have the option of selecting a particular asset or collection of assets and viewing this information in the customer specialized format. Further, from the project details page 848, users also have the option of viewing project-level forecast information. Regarding the forecast information, upon selection of this option, a material list forecast page 854 is displayed which includes various forecast information relating to the number of assets are associated with the project, the size of the assets, etc. At this point, a selection to view asset-specific forecast information is also provided. Upon this selection, an asset forecast page 856 is displayed.

10 Returning to the asset search form in page 850, upon selection of this page from either the project select page or the project details page, information regarding the particular asset or assets requested is submitted. Upon submission of the asset search form on page 850, resulting asset information is displayed in the customer specialized format in page 838.

15 Returning now to page 842 relating to the receipt/rejection of assets, users at this point may choose to either confirm receipt of an asset in page 860 or enter an acceptance exception. If the asset is to be received without exception, the user simply indicates receipt and, upon submission, is returning to the asset search listing page 838. However, if an exception is to be entered, an asset exception annotation page 862 is displayed to the user. At this point, the user enters the exception information and submits the information in page 864. From the asset details page, users also have a variety of additional options, asset exceptions may be entered in page 862, asset location information may be modified or updated in page 872, asset storage maintenance details may be viewed in page 870, and asset packing list detail information may be viewed in page 874. Regarding the asset 20 location page 870, upon display of this page, any modifications to the asset location are made and submitted in page 876.

25 By utilizing the above-described collection of various interactive web pages, customer-side project site management users are easily able to update and view an appropriate level of asset management information. Additionally, these users are also able to synchronize this data with data maintained on a remote client computer system in the manner set forth in detail above.

30 Referring now specifically to FIG. 9, the present embodiment includes additional options specifically relating to the features and options available to customer-side high level management level users. However, as above, upon entry of a URL associated with

the web application area's website, a home page 900 is displayed to the customer-side high level management user. Again, several options are available to customer-side high level management users at this time. Prior to logging in to obtain access to user-specific asset information, customer-side high level management users may select a plurality of administrative pages, such as a help page 902, a sitemap 904, showing the layout of the website, a contact page 906 for facilitating communication with the website operators, and a feedback form 908 and associated submission page 910. From either the home page 900 or any of the administrative pages 902-910, customer-side high level management users may choose to login to the site. In response to this selection, a login form 912 is provided to the customer-side high level management user for receiving login information, such as, e.g., a username and password combination. Subsequently, the information is received and processed in the manner briefly described above to determine the level of site access the customer-side high level management user is afforded. If the login information is determined to be inaccurate, an appropriate error message page 914 prompting reentry of the information is displayed. Following entry of appropriate login information, a main menu 916 is displayed to the customer-side high level management user including several options including a search by asset number or RFID tag number option, and a select project option.

The customer-side high level management user may choose to view project or asset specific information in a variety of manners. Initially, the user may choose to simply input an asset identification number or RFID tag number and view the asset(s) associated with that number. In a preferred embodiment, this number may be entered directly on the main menu 916. Submission of this number then results in display of the corresponding assets in a customer specialized format in page 938. Once the asset search results have been displayed, users then have the ability view additional information regarding a selected asset in page 944, or export the search results to an external spreadsheet application in page 940. Referring specifically to the asset details page 944, users also have a variety of additional options from this point. In particular, asset storage maintenance details may be viewed in page 972, and asset packing list detail information may be viewed in page 974.

Returning to the main menu 916, users can also search for asset management information by selecting an available project. Upon selection of this option, a listing of available projects is displayed in page 946. From this location, users may chose to view project-level detail information in page 948 including a listing of all assets associated

with the selected project, search for assets included within the project in page 950.

Turning specifically to page 948, once project-level detail information is displayed for a selected project, users have several options available for displaying additional information. Initially, they may choose to display the asset search page 950 for further narrowing the number of available assets. Additionally, users have the option of selecting a particular asset or collection of assets and viewing this information in the customer specialized format. Further, from the project details page 948, users also have the option of viewing project-level forecast information. Regarding the forecast information, upon selection of this option, a material list forecast page 954 is displayed which includes various forecast information relating to the number of assets are associated with the project, the size of the assets, etc. At this point, a selection to view asset-specific forecast information is also provided. Upon this selection, an asset forecast page 956 is displayed.

Returning to the asset search form in page 950, upon selection of this page from either the project select page or the project details page, information regarding the particular asset or assets requested is submitted. Upon submission of the asset search form on page 950, resulting asset information is displayed in the customer specialized format in page 938. From this point, the asset details page 944 may be selected, as described above.

20 By utilizing the collection of various interactive web pages described above,
customer-side high level management users are easily able to view an appropriate level of
asset management information. It should be noted that, unlike other user types previously
described in association with FIGS. 4-8, customer-side high level management users do
not have any access to the modification or data entry capabilities of the website, since this
type of functionality is beyond both the requirements and responsibility of this type of
25 user.

In accordance with the above described embodiments, the present invention provides a comprehensive system and method for maintaining and accessing asset management information in an easily implemented and updated manner. By facilitating both the collection and entry of asset management and tracking information as well as follow-up status and maintenance information, a current database of information can easily be maintained for subsequent review and utility.

Referring now to FIG. 10, a flow diagram illustrates one embodiment of the handheld device software application and its functionality as briefly described above in FIG. 2, above. As discussed, the handheld device 226 may be utilized to perform the

same general functions described in FIGS. 3-9 above. Further, several additional functions may be performed only by the handheld device, such as asset or tag location and searching.

Initially, a device user logs in to the handheld device in step 1000. It should be
5 understood that for single user devices, this step may be omitted, however, where
additional users are envisioned, step 1000 may be utilized and set equal to a default user.
Next, in step 1002, the user selects a project for which information has been downloaded
and synchronized (as described above). Although typically local device databases (such
as that shown at element 1003) are limited to either single projects or a small number of
10 projects, depending upon the amount of memory included in the handheld device, the
listing of available projects may be expanded to include all projects included in the
system.

Upon project selection, the handheld device displays the number of assets in the
project as well as a listing of available search/display options to the user. In step 1004,
15 the user may then select one of these options for obtaining and viewing information for
individual assets or asset management devices. In the illustrated embodiment, the
available search/display options include a asset confirmation option, an auto scan option,
a locate/view case option, and a smart search option. As described in detail below, each
of these options may be utilized independently to provide the user with a complete ability
20 to monitor and manage all assets within the project.

Referring specifically to the locate/view asset option, the user selects this option
in step 1006 by selecting a particular a particular asset included within a dropdown listing
of assets associated with the selected project. In response, the handheld device displays
an asset information screen, one embodiment of which is illustrated in FIG. 11. By
25 viewing the asset information screen, the user is easily and quickly able to determine the
present status of the status as well as its general location. Relating particularly to the
embodiment illustrated in FIG. 11, a plurality of indicators 1100 provide quick access to
this information. The indicators preferably include an Asset Confirmed indicator 1102,
the presence of which indicates that receipt of the Asset has previously been confirmed, a
30 Tag Attached indicator 1104, indicating that the particular asset has an electronic tag
attached thereto, a Tag Detected indicator 1106, the presence of which indicates that a
scan of the area has found the tag associated with the asset, and a Storage Location
indicator 1108, which indicates that the selected asset is located in storage. Additionally,

additional information for the selected asset may also be viewed by selecting the More button 1110.

In addition to enabling the viewing of asset status information, the locate/view asset option also enables the handheld user to locate the particular asset among a number 5 of assets, potentially grouped together in a laydown yard or the like. Referring to the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 11, by selecting the Locate button 1112, the handheld device searches the available area for the selected asset. If found, the handheld device will emit a sound, such as a beep, which increases in both frequency and volume as the user physically approaches the location of the selected asset. In this manner, the handheld 10 device may be used to locate a specific asset in a crowded yard, potentially saving the user from manually going through each available asset.

Returning now to FIG. 10, users may also select an auto scan option from among the various search/display options available. Upon selection of this option in step 1008, the handheld device displays an autoscan screen, wherein the user selects or otherwise 15 inputs an asset location area description, such as "laydown yard" or "warehouse". The user then initiates the start of a scan, whereby the handheld device scans for asset identification tags within its range. As each tag is electronically detected the handheld device populates a list of tags that is displayed to the user. The user then walks around the entire asset location area leaving the handheld in the scanning mode.

When the user has finished scanning the area, they stop the scanning process, whereby the handheld device then compares the list of tags detected with the internal 20 database downloaded from the web application. If the handheld device finds a match between a detected tag and the tags in the database it will test to see if the asset has been previously scanned. If the tag has not been scanned previously it will update the internal database by 'timestamping' the tag with the date and time the tag was detected. Also, the handheld computer will update the detected tags location with the above selected asset 25 location area if the database record does not have a previously assigned location area. However, if a tag is not on the internal database list it may store this in a separate file for later upload, since it may be that the identified asset includes either misassigned or 30 misshipped material. In this manner, the auto scan feature enables a user to reduce the amount of time currently taken to inventory or catalog an asset location area using such electronic asset identification devices. Because individual electronic tags may be used to designate more than one asset, search results of the auto scan option may be provided by electronic tag number. Once tags have been identified, user may then select the

associated tag number and view information regarding assets associated with the selected tag. One example of an auto scan results screen is shown in FIG. 12.

Returning to FIG. 10, the user may also select the Smart Search option in step 1010. By selecting this option, the user can enter various search criteria regarding a 5 particular asset or group of assets and view and/or modify the results retrieved in step 1012. Once embodiment of a smart search criteria screen is shown in FIG. 13 and includes search criteria of PO number, MLI number and tag number. Upon selection of information in any of these categories, the handheld device will perform a search for assets meeting these criteria. Once an asset has been identified, status and location 10 information may be viewed and modified as set forth above.

Once an asset has been identified, either based upon specific knowledge or using one of the methods set forth above, users may select the case confirmation option in step 1014 to either confirm receipt of the asset or view/modify an earlier confirmation. Upon 15 this selection, the handheld device presents the user with the ability to confirm receipt of the selected asset either with or without exceptions. Exceptions may be entered in step 1016 and additional exception details may be entered in step 1018. Additionally, as indicated above, the above steps may be similarly completed when reviewing or modifying a prior receipt and confirmation of an asset.

Referring now to FIG. 14, there is illustrated one embodiment of an asset 20 confirmation screen. As shown therein, users may indicate whether an asset is received with or without exceptions in area 1400. Additionally, information relating to the assets location may be submitted in area 1402, whether the asset has been received into storage may be received in area 1404 and the date of the scan may be received in area 1406. Additionally, if exceptions are being entered, an asset exception screen is presented 25 wherein a general reason for the exception may be submitted, viewed or modified. Additionally, once a general reason is selected, an additional asset exception details page is displayed wherein details regarding the type and reason for the exception may be entered, viewed, or modified.

Returning now to FIG. 10, once an asset has been confirmed, information 30 regarding the asset's maintenance requirements or maintenance status may be submitted or viewed by the user information in step 1020. In this manner, upon completion of required maintenance tasks, users can easily modify the maintenance information for subsequent synchronization and upload to the asset management database.

In addition to providing data based upon specified search criteria, one embodiment of the present invention also includes the ability to limit the number of available assets based upon predefined criteria such as: all assets received; all assets not received; all assets confirmed; and all assets not confirmed. By providing this 5 functionality it is even easier for users to directly drill down to the specific asset material they are searching for.

By providing a handheld device with the capability to receive and synchronize asset and project information from a centralized database and user field entry, the present invention better enables the accurate and up to date exchange of asset management 10 information. Once assets are located and confirmed by users with the handheld device, this information is easily transmitted to the web application area and is subsequently available to the various users in the manner described in detail above. By providing users with the ability to enter information into a remote database on site via the handheld device, the accuracy of this information is substantially improved.

15 Although the above-described embodiments meet many asset management and tracking needs, the present invention provides additional utility through the inclusion of intelligent tracking, asset management and sensor devices that enable the storage and transmission of dynamic sensory information in addition to static information of the type described in detail above. Referring now to FIG. 15, there is shown a block diagram 20 illustrating one embodiment of such an intelligent sensing device 1500 of the present invention. In particular, intelligent sensing device 1500 includes each of the following elements: a plurality of connectors 1502 for receiving external inputs; an analog to digital converter 1504 for converting received analog signals into digital signals; a processing 25 unit 1506 for performing any signal processing required by the device; a memory 1508 operatively connected to the processor for storing information on the device; a power supply 1510 for providing required power to the processor and other elements; a radio frequency (RF) transceiver 1512 and antenna 1514 for enabling transmission and receipt of information wirelessly to other devices or readers; and a visual display 1516 for enabling the device to indicate current status or other information visually.

30 In addition to the above-described elements, the intelligent sensing device 1500 of the present invention also includes at least one sensor element 1518 and a corresponding actuator element 1520. In the manner more fully described below, sensor 1518 and actuator 1520 may be configured to provide additional information regarding the status and history of an asset's shipping and operating conditions. This information is then

processed and stored in memory 1508 for subsequent transmission by the RF transceiver 1512. In this way, shipping conditions and asset status may be more accurately identified and maintained. The intelligent sensing device 1500 may be configured to include various types of sensors for monitoring and recording shipping and operating conditions, 5 several of which are described below, thereby enabling users to learn about potential harmful or damaging conditions or any other breaches of operating guidelines.

In one example, an intelligent asset management device may include a collision sensor for maintaining a record of asset collisions. A vibration sensor may be utilized to monitor asset vibration. The asset management device then takes the monitored data and 10 perform a vibration pattern analysis to more accurately determine asset condition. Speed sensors may be utilized to monitor the speed of an asset and maintain a record of this speed. Force/pressure sensors may be employed to monitor pressures placed on a sensor. The device then processes the pressure data and determines pressure trends and patterns. A tilt sensor may be employed to measure shipping and operation compliance with asset 15 tilt guidelines. A tamper sensor may be employed to provide asset security and access control capabilities. A level sensor may be used to monitor levels or heights of materials during transit/operation. A weight sensors may be employed to provide wireless weighing of an asset for use by weigh stations. A photo-sensitive vision sensor may be used for tamper control or to monitor operating conditions. A GPS (global positioning 20 satellite) sensor may be utilized to provide real-time geographic positioning information for an asset. Further, a chemical sensor may be employed to monitor asset exposure to specific chemicals or conditions such as moisture, smoke, carbon-monoxide, etc. Although various sensors have been described above, it should be understood that the 25 present invention is in no way limited by this recitation. Rather, any suitable sensor may be implemented in accordance with the present invention.

By providing the above-described asset management devices with any combination of the above sensors, a more accurate indication of an assets location or operating conditions/history may be made available to system users in accordance with the methods described in detail above.

30 In addition to the inclusion of various sensors, the processing unit 1506 of asset management device 1500 may also be configured to include signal processing and decision making (SPDM) capabilities. In this manner, information received from the sensor units may be dynamically processed and stored in accordance with programming selections, rather than raw, unprocessed data which must be further processed upon

receipt by a reading device. In one example, an asset management device equipped with a speed sensor may further be configured to process the monitored speeds such that only information concerning speeds over a certain threshold will be recorded for future retrieval. This ability to dynamically process received information greatly enhances the 5 flow of relevant information between the asset management device and the end user receiving status information therefrom.

In addition, for asset management devices which perform broadcast functions (that is, they broadcast information without first receiving an explicit request), SPDM processing enables the device to perform such broadcasting only upon the presence of 10 certain conditions. In this manner, a dynamic network of intelligent management devices may be maintained while still maintaining sufficient power supply to operate for an extended duration. Constant broadcast of information, conversely, would significantly increase the power needs of each device, thereby reducing the overall lifetime for such devices.

15 In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, asset management device processors may also be configured to enable the devices to engage in device-to-device communication. By enabling the transceiver units to share information with other devices, as well as the handheld or stationary readers described above, information regarding asset location and status may be more readily available. Additionally, 20 combining this feature with SPDM processing further results in a ubiquitous system of pervasive informatics, wherein information monitored and processed by one device may be shared among similarly situated devices which monitor different conditions.

An additional feature of the present invention is an intelligent asset management 25 device having a low power requirement, thereby enabling extended operational use. In particular, power supply 1510 is, in one embodiment, a passive device which transmits information only when queried by a reading device or another asset management device and only over a short distance range e.g., 7-8 feet. Alternatively, the asset management devices of the present invention may be active devices which actively transmit 30 information in response to predetermined conditions over extended distances, such as approximately 200 feet. For these embodiments, power supplies are more robust and may include such elements as photovoltaic films (e.g., solar films), or other condition responsive power sources. For a photovoltaic embodiment, a power supply having one film may sufficiently power the device for one week without additional light. Additional examples include power supplies driven by wind, pressure, motion, etc. By providing

alternative power sources to conventional batteries, the lifetime and range of the asset management device may be further enhanced.

Referring now to FIG. 16, there is shown one embodiment of a graphical display 1602 for a handheld device 1600 of the present invention. In the present embodiment, an intelligent asset management device is configured to include an accelerometer sensor that may be used to record changes in acceleration undergone by the asset management device, and hence the asset it is mounted to. Changes in acceleration can indicate collisions and tilting or tipping over of the asset. Upon receipt of the asset in the manner described above, the handheld device can request and receive the data measured by the accelerometer. As shown in FIG. 16, the graphical display 1602 includes a graph of volts over time, with the significant changes in acceleration being denoted by large jumps 1604 and 1606 in the graph. These jumps indicate likely collisions or tilts to the asset.

Referring now to FIG. 17, there is shown a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a method for receiving assets configured to include the intelligent asset management device of FIG. 15. In step 1700, the asset is received by a carrier for shipment to an end destination. Next, in step 1702, the attached asset management device operates to monitor the shipment process in accordance with the sensors incorporated into the device. As described above, these sensors may include force sensors, vibration sensors, collision sensors, or the like.

In step 1704, the asset is received at its destination in the manner set forth above in FIG. 4. Next, in step 1706, the receiver reviews the information collected by the asset management device during transit. In step 1708, it is determined, based upon the reviewed information, whether to accept or reject the asset. Once a decision has been made, the receiver updates the asset management system with the decision and any other status information regarding the asset in step 1710.

Referring now to FIG. 18, there is shown a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of an alternative method for utilizing the intelligent asset management device of FIG. 15. In this embodiment, a plurality of asset management devices are configured to include coordinating sensors and collectors for enabling transmission of information wirelessly between multiple management devices. In one embodiment, the system may include at least one rail signal configured to include a signal sensor. In step 1800, the signal is activated. Next, in step 1802, the signal sensor device operates to transmit signal performance and status information, such as red, yellow, green, etc..

In accordance with the present embodiment, a locomotive transporting assets or individual assets within the locomotive are configured to include intelligent asset management devices having collectors thereon. In step 1804, the locomotive passes within a predetermined proximity of the rail signal sensor. In step 1806, the collector in 5 receives the signal performance and status information transmitted from the signal sensor. In step 1808, this information may then be subsequently reviewed to determine the operation status of the signal light as well as its condition when the locomotive passed.

Referring now to FIG. 19, there is shown a network diagram illustrating one embodiment of an information network 1900 created by a plurality of asset management 10 devices and readers configured in accordance with the present invention. In particular, network 1900 includes a plurality of asset management devices 1902 associated with particular operating environments. Such operating environments may include general environments such as at least one manufacturing environment 1904, and at least one shipping/warehouse environment 1906. Further each of these general environments may 15 also be further broken down into sub-environments. Referring specifically to the manufacturing environment, such sub-environments may include a parts manufacturing environment 1908, a material production station 1910, and a product assembly station 1912.

Additionally, each of the environments and sub-environments also include a 20 station relay 1914 for processing received information and for coordinating the relay of signals from the various asset management devices 1902 between each other and between the various sub-environments. To facilitate the collection and subsequent dissemination of information between disparate locations, a central network controller 1916 is also 25 provided for further extending the reach of network 1900. At least one database 1918 is also provided to enable storage and subsequent retrieval of the information created and monitored by the various connected asset management devices 1902.

By providing manufactured items with the intelligent asset management devices of the present invention, businesses are better enable to monitor the status and condition 30 of these assets, thereby better serving the end customers. In accordance with network 1900, information regarding the status of any connected asset may be easily shared across multiple operating environments. Additionally, by utilizing asset management devices configured for two-way communications, updated information may be written to the devices from both local and remote sources.

Referring now to FIG. 20, there is shown a generalized flow diagram illustrating another embodiment of an asset management system 2000 of the present invention. In asset management system 2000, an asset management database or collection of databases is provided in step 2002 for maintaining a plurality of records relating to the various assets to be maintained. In a preferred embodiment, the asset management database includes an Oracle database having records relating to asset information (TBL-MMAT_CASE); asset update information (TBL-MMAT_CASEUPDATE); and project information (TBL-MMAT_PROJECT). Next, a desktop computer is provided with software for retrieving asset information from the asset management database in step 10 2004 over a computer network such as the Internet. Preferably, the desktop computer includes an application written in the visual basic (VB) programming language and operating to download asset management information from the asset management database over the computer network. In one embodiment, this download of asset management information may be scheduled to occur automatically, based upon a 15 predetermined schedule.

Upon retrieval of requested asset management information from the at least one database, a plurality of data files are created or replaced on the desktop computer in step 2006. In a preferred embodiment, the data files include text-based versions of the asset management information in a delimited format (e.g., case.csv or case.xml). Next, a 20 handheld computer is provided and operatively connected to the desktop computer in step 2008, typically through a synchronization cradle, docking station, or other hardware-based interface. Alternatively, wireless interfaces such as Bluetooth, IRdA, or 802.11(x)-based systems are also contemplated. Upon connection, the plurality of data files are transmitted into a database on the handheld computer from the desktop computer, thereby 25 providing asset information to the handheld computer from the asset management database. In one preferred embodiment, connection and synchronization between the handheld computer and the desktop computer is accomplished through the use of a computer application from Microsoft Corp. entitled ActiveSync. The ActiveSync application creates a partnership between the handheld and desktop computers enabling 30 subsequent communication and data exchange. In the manner described in detail above, the handheld computer is also provided with RFID tag reading capabilities for detecting associated RFID tags and exchanging information therewith.

In step 2010, a software application maintained on the handheld computer (e.g., TagDetect.exe) in conjunction with the RFID tag reader, is utilized to both detect asset

tags as well as input information regarding the asset in the manner described above. In a preferred embodiment, the handheld computer software application is written in the C++ computer language. During its use, the handheld computer software application generates a datafile in step 2012 which includes all asset information that was updated during the 5 application's use. In a preferred embodiment, this data file is in a text-based delimited file format, such as csv (comma separated values).

Next, in step 2014, the handheld computer is again synchronized with the desktop computer to place the updated asset information data file thereon. In step 2016, this 10 information is then synchronized with the asset management database so as to maintain the integrity of the underlying asset management database, with information included thereon being available to all personnel having access to the database.

Referring now to FIG. 21, there is shown a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of a method for creating the handheld computer database to enable efficient operation given the processing and power constraints of the handheld computer. In 15 conventional database formation for handheld computers running the Windows CE operating system, databases are typically formed by using the class CCeDBDatabase which is included within the Microsoft Windows CE package and which operates to encapsulate the database into the object store (e.g., the main storage element of the handheld computer). Using this class, lines of the input delimited datafile are read in 20 using the "AddRecord" method. Unfortunately, it was determined that this process proved to be unacceptable given the number of records to be inserted. Accordingly, the following method was implemented to dramatically reduce handheld database creation/updating times.

In step 2100, a class (CCaseDB, in the present embodiment) is created in the 25 handheld computer, wherein each line of data being read into the handheld database creates an object in the class. This class is derived from the CObject class which is part of the Windows CE standard library. Next, in step 2102, another class (CCaseDBList, in the present embodiment) is created using the Windows CE template libraries and is 30 structured to contain each instance of the CCcaseDB class described above. The structure of this class may be defined by the following:

```
typedef CTypedPtrList<CObList, CcaseDB*>CCaseDBList;
```

Next, in step 2104, upon synchronization with the desktop computer system, a plurality of data objects are created in class CCcaseDB for each line of data in the input asset management information file. In step 2106, the combined number of CCcaseDB

object classes are encapsulated within the CCaseDBList class thereby adding or removing any modified records from the prior version of this class and creating or modifying the database for the handheld computer.

Referring now to FIG. 22, there is shown a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of the method for filtering data from the asset management database for creation of the text-based datafile (e.g., case.csv or case.xml). In step 2200, the desktop device receives a designation from the user regarding which project or projects for which the user has some responsibility or role. Next, a user request to synchronize the desktop computer with the asset management database is received in step 2202. In step 2204, the asset and asset update tables (MMAT_CASE and MMAT_CASEUPDATE, respectively) are queried for asset information relating to the received project designation(s). One example of a database query is set forth below, wherein each database entry includes a plurality of information from one of the two database structures:

```
15  SELECT MMAT_CASE.CASEKEY,MMAT_CASEUPDATE.CASENUMBER,MMAT_CASE.PROJECTID,
        MMAT_CASEUPDATE.ETAGNUMBER, MMAT_CASEUPDATE.CONFIRMATIONDATE,
        MMAT_CASEUPDATE.CONFIRMATIONNAME, MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONREASON,
        MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONCOMMENT, MMAT_CASE.ACTUALPICKUPDATE,
        MMAT_CASE.ACTUALDELIVERYDATE, MMAT_CASE.MLI, MMAT_CASE.DESCRIPTION,
        MMAT_CASE.ICN, MMAT_CASEUPDATE.LAYDOWNLOCATION MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONPRESERVATION,
        MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONPACKAGING , MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONPACKING ,
        MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONMARKINGS, MMAT_CASEUPDATE.EXCEPTIONPACKINGLIST,
        MMAT_CASE.PONUMBER, MMAT_CASE.POLINENUMBER, MMAT_CASE.STORAGESTATUS,
        MMAT_CASEUPDATE.DATERECEIVED
      FROM MMAT_CASE, MMAT_CASEUPDATE
      WHERE MMAT_CASE.CASEKEY = MMAT_CASEUPDATE.CASEKEY AND PROJECTID = 'KENDL'
```

In the above example, the received project designation is referenced by the variable "PROJECTID".

Next, in step 2206, retrieved asset information is compiled into a text-based datafile and transmitted to the desktop computer over the computer network in step 2208. By limiting the query of the asset management database to only those projects for which the user has a responsibility, the overall size of the transmitted datafile is maintained in a much more manageable size, thereby increasing response times and reducing resource requirements.

While the foregoing description includes many details and specificities, it is to be understood that these have been included for purposes of explanation only, and are not to be interpreted as limitations of the present invention. Many modifications to the embodiments described above can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of

the invention, as is intended to be encompassed by the following claims and their legal equivalents.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for enabling enhanced asset management and tracking capabilities, comprising:
 - a plurality of electronic asset identification devices, wherein each of the plurality of electronic asset identification devices is affixed to an asset whose location and information are to be managed, wherein each of the plurality of asset identification devices includes at least unique identification information relating to the asset to which it is affixed;
 - an asset management server computer system for maintaining at least one database containing information regarding the asset identification devices and the assets to which they are affixed;
 - a remote client computer system operatively connected to the asset management server computer system for exchanging information over a computer network; and
 - at least one interrogation device operatively connected to the remote client computer system, wherein the at least one interrogation device receives information from the plurality of asset identification devices and exchanges said information with the remote client computer system.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of electronic asset management devices include radio frequency identification tags.
3. The system of claim 2, wherein the at least one interrogation device includes a handheld radio frequency identification tag reader.
4. The system of claim 1, wherein the asset management server computer system further comprises:
 - at least one web application server computer system for serving a plurality of interactive web pages relating to the asset identification devices and the assets to which they are affixed.
5. The system of claim 4, wherein the plurality of interactive web pages include:
 - a home page;

a login page for receiving user login information;

 a main menu page for displaying a plurality of options to users, selection of which a user to view and/or modify the asset management information maintained on the asset management web server computer system;

 a project details page for displaying general information regarding asset management information relating to a selected project;

 an asset search page for receiving asset search criteria from the user, the submission of which causes the asset management web server computer system to retrieve asset management information matching the submitted search criteria;

 an asset search results page for displaying the retrieved asset management information; and

 an asset details page for displaying specific asset management information relating to a selected one of the assets displayed on the asst search results page.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the at least one interrogation device further comprises:

 a computer software application resident thereon, wherein the computer software application incorporates one or more instructions for wirelessly determining the presence of a plurality of electronic asset identification devices.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein the computer software application further comprises:

 one or more instructions for receiving an asset location area description;

 one or more instructions for scanning the asset location area to identify the presence therein of electronic asset identification devices; and

 one or more instructions for determining whether identified electronic asset identification devices correspond to information received from the asset management server computer system.

8. A system for enabling enhanced asset management and tracking capabilities, comprising:

 a plurality of electronic asset identification devices, wherein each of the plurality of electronic asset identification devices is affixed to an asset whose location and information are to be managed, wherein each of the plurality of asset identification

devices includes at least unique identification information relating to the asset to which it is affixed;

an asset management server computer system for maintaining at least one asset management database containing information regarding the asset identification devices and the assets to which they are affixed;

a remote client computer system operatively connected to the asset management server computer system for exchanging information over a computer network; and

at least one handheld computer operatively connected to the remote client computer system, wherein the handheld computer system operates to exchange information with the plurality of asset identification devices and with the remote client computer system,

wherein the handheld computer system maintains at least one handheld computer database containing information exchanged between the remote client computer system and the plurality of asset identification devices.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the plurality of electronic asset management devices include radio frequency identification tags and wherein the at least one handheld computer includes a radio frequency identification tag reader.

10. The system of claim 8, further comprising:

at least one legacy database system operatively connected to the asset management server computer system, for enabling exchange of legacy information relating to the assets to be managed.

11. The system of claim 8, wherein the at least one asset management database further comprises:

a first table for including asset specific information;

a second table for including updates to the asset specific information;

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the at least one asset management database further comprises a third table for including project information relating to a plurality of assets.

13. The system of claim 8, wherein the remote client computer system comprises:

a computer software application incorporating one or more instructions for receiving asset management information from the at least one asset management database on the asset management server computer system.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the computer software application includes one or more instructions for receiving asset management information from the at least one asset management database on the asset management server computer system according to a predetermined schedule.

15. The system of claim 8, wherein the handheld computer includes software instructions for reading data from the remote client computer system into the handheld database.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein the handheld computer software instructions further comprise:

one or more instructions for creating a first class structure for including individual handheld database entries relating to assets;

one or more instructions for creating a second class structure for providing a repository for each of the handheld database entries maintained by the first class structure;

one or more instructions for receiving a request to synchronize asset management data with the remote client computer system;

one or more instructions for receiving a datafile from the remote client computer system; and

one or more instructions for reading lines of data from the datafile into objects created in the first class structure during exchange of information with the remote client computer system, wherein each line relates to a particular asset.

17. An intelligent sensing apparatus, comprising:

at least one sensor element;

a processing unit operatively connected to the sensor element, wherein the processing unit includes at least recording, storing and transmitting processing capabilities;

a power supply operatively connected to the processing unit;

a memory operatively connected to the processing unit and the power supply;
 a radio frequency transceiver operatively connected to the processing unit and the power supply; and
 an antenna operatively connected to the radio frequency transceiver and the power supply.

18. The intelligent sensing apparatus of claim 1, wherein the at least one sensor element includes sensors for monitoring and recording shipping and operating conditions.

19. A method for receiving assets comprising the steps of:

 receiving at least one asset at a carrier, wherein the at least one asset includes at least one intelligent asset management and sensing device;

 monitoring shipment conditions of the at least one asset during transit to a destination, by the at least one intelligent asset management and sensing device;

 arriving at the destination;

 retrieving a shipment record from the at least one intelligent asset management and sensing device relating to the monitored shipping conditions of the at least one asset; and

 determining, based upon the shipment record, whether to accept or reject the at least one asset.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the at least one intelligent asset management and sensing device includes at least one sensing element for measuring environmental conditions during shipment.

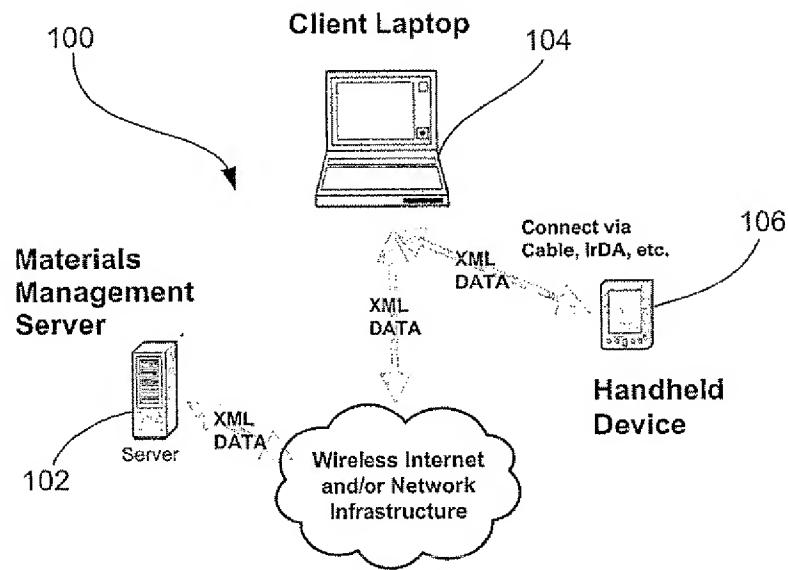
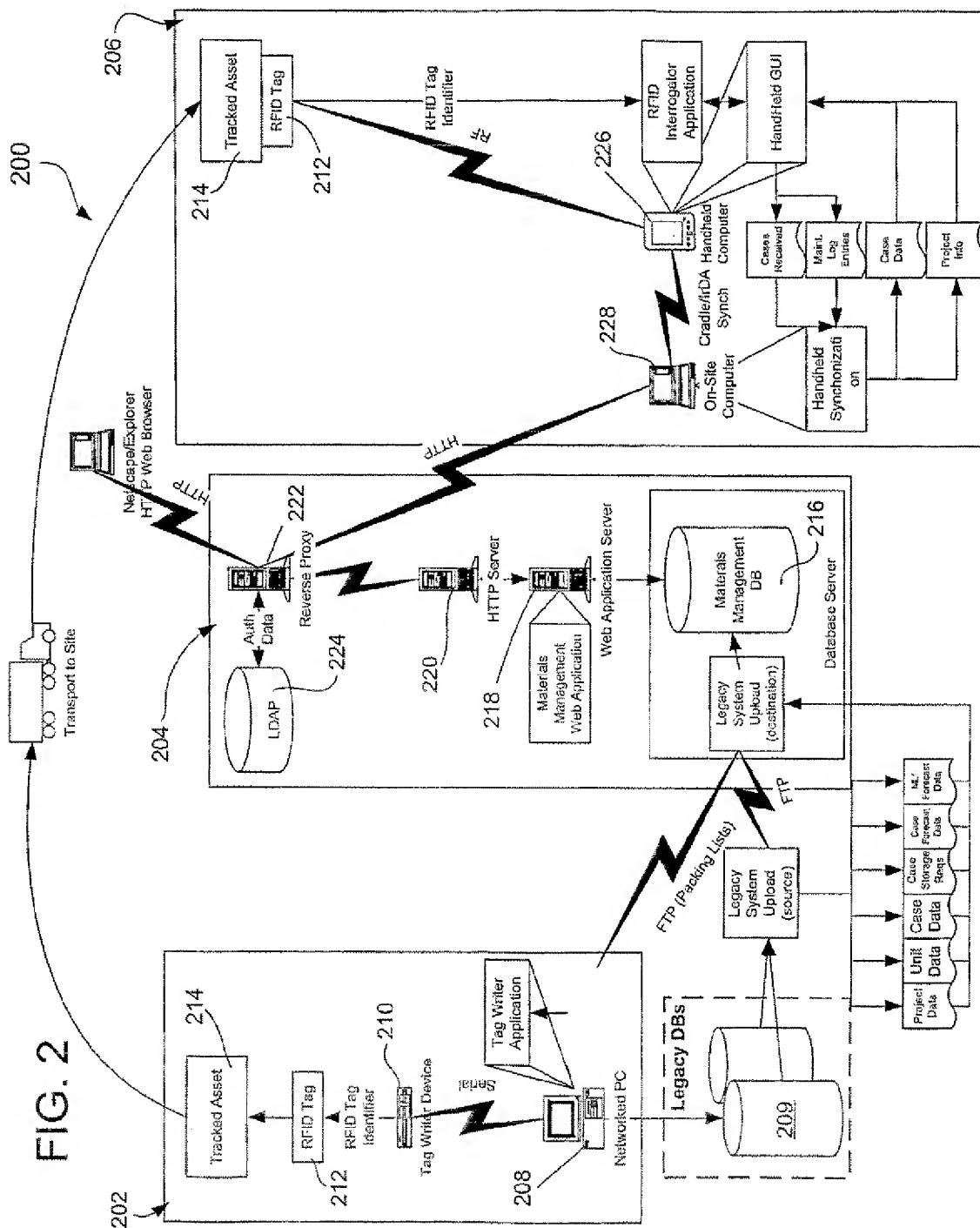
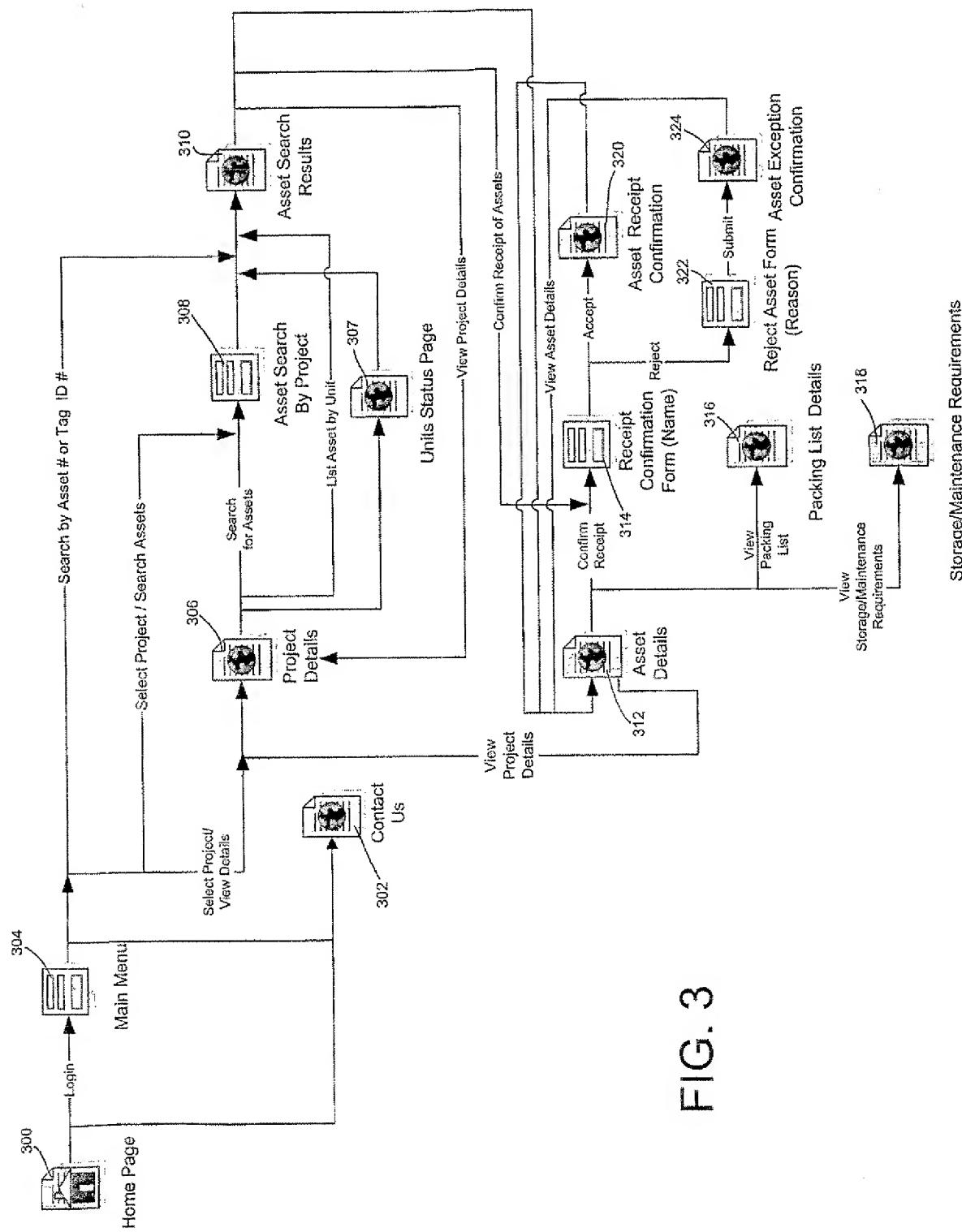


FIG. 1





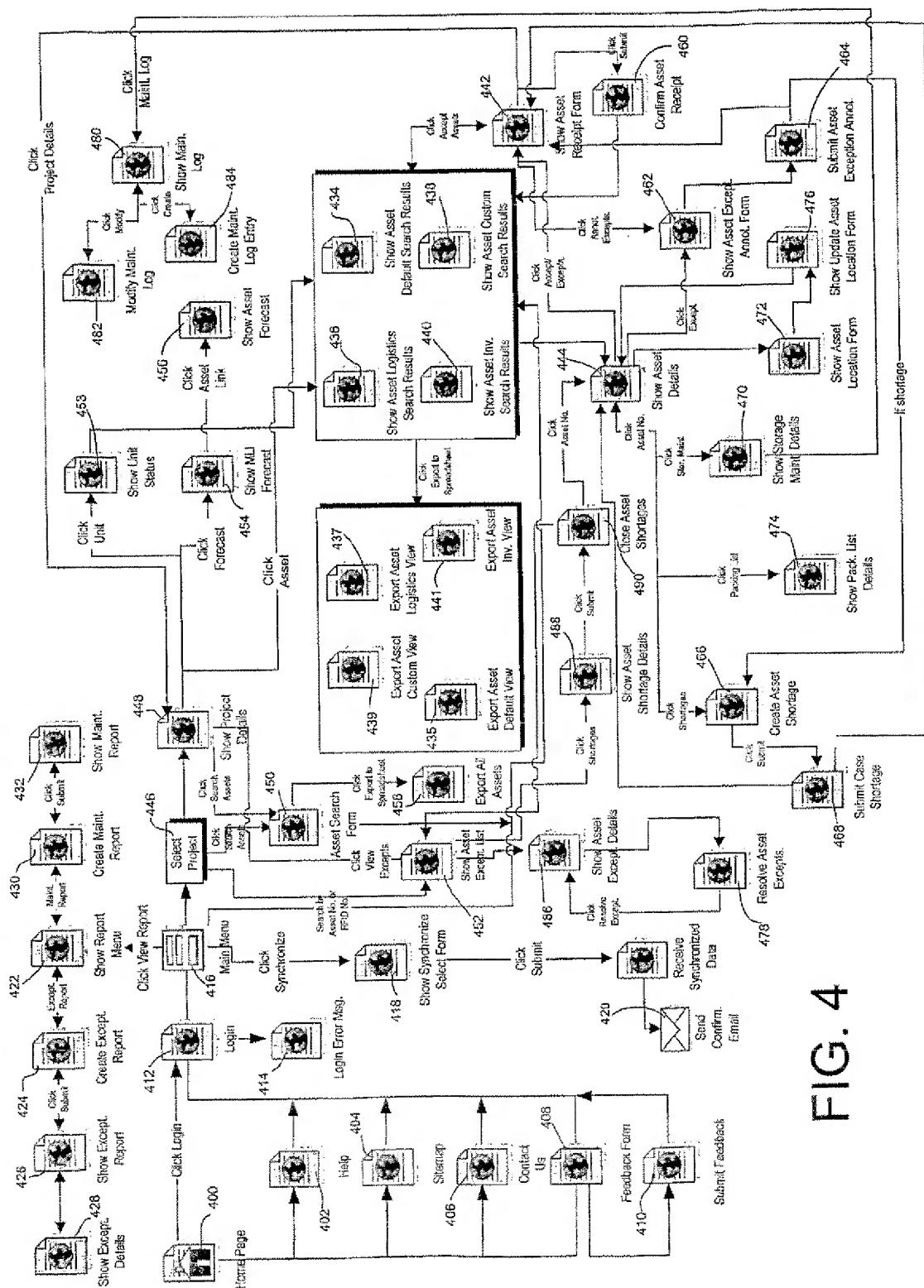
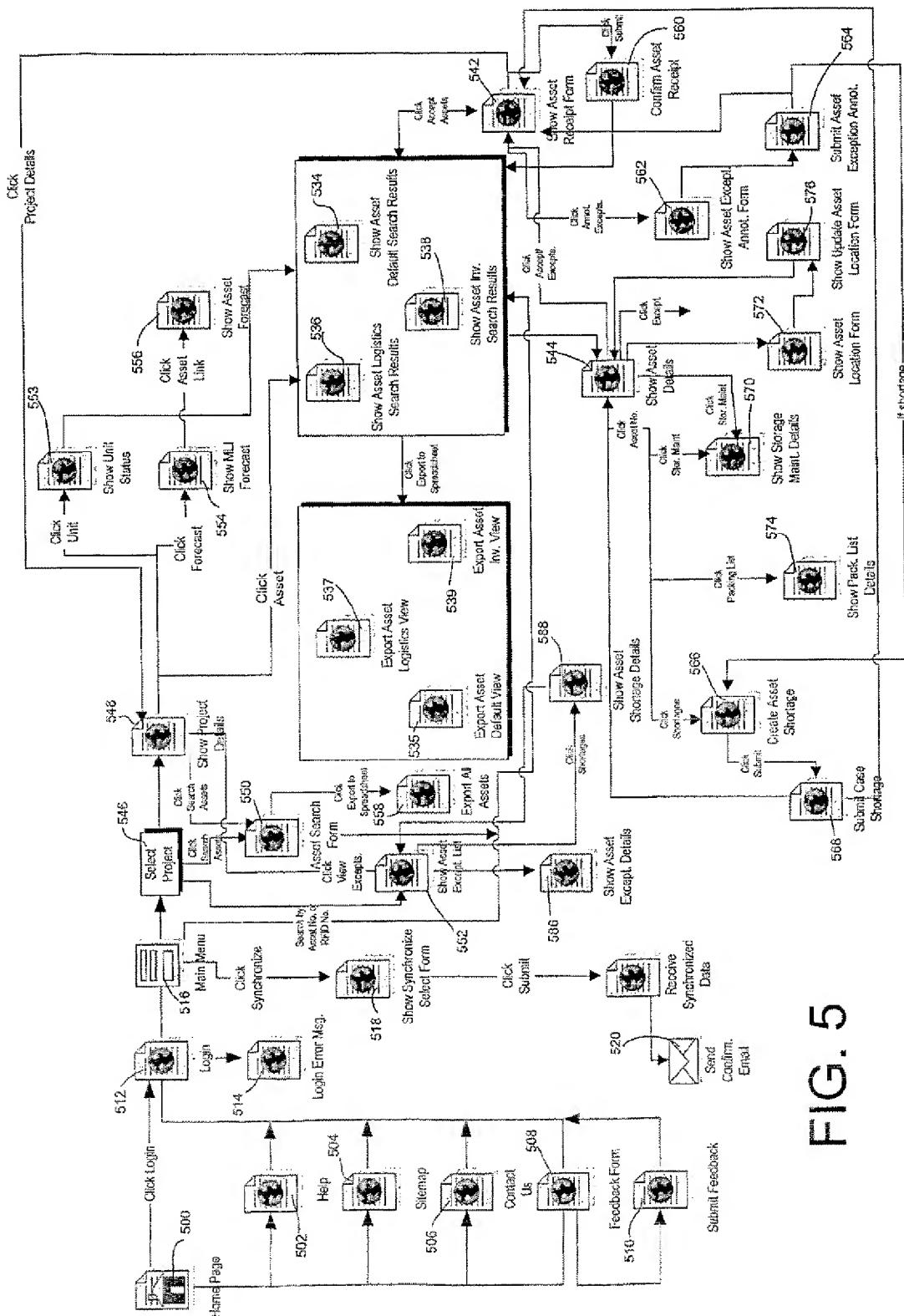
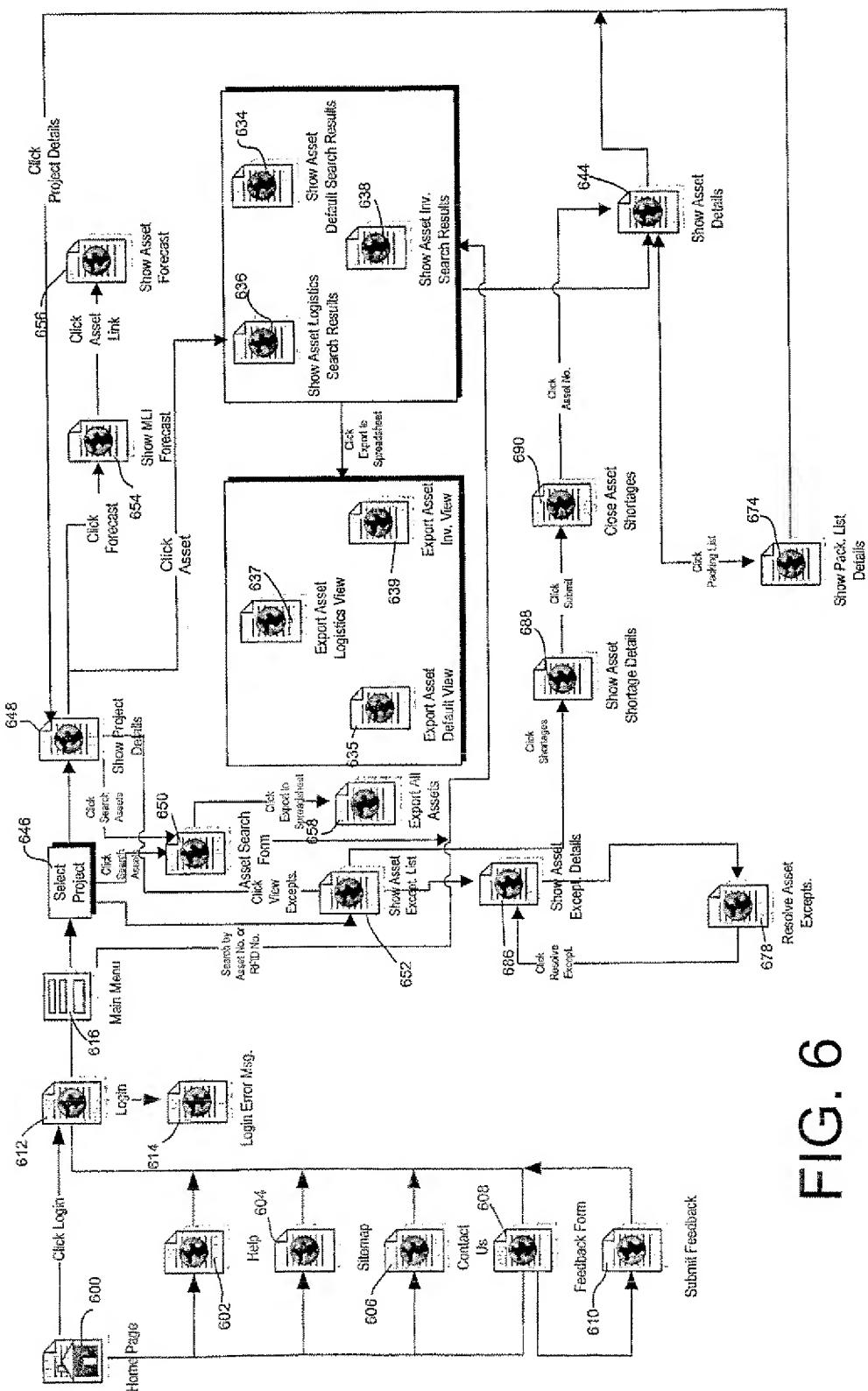


FIG. 4



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FIG.



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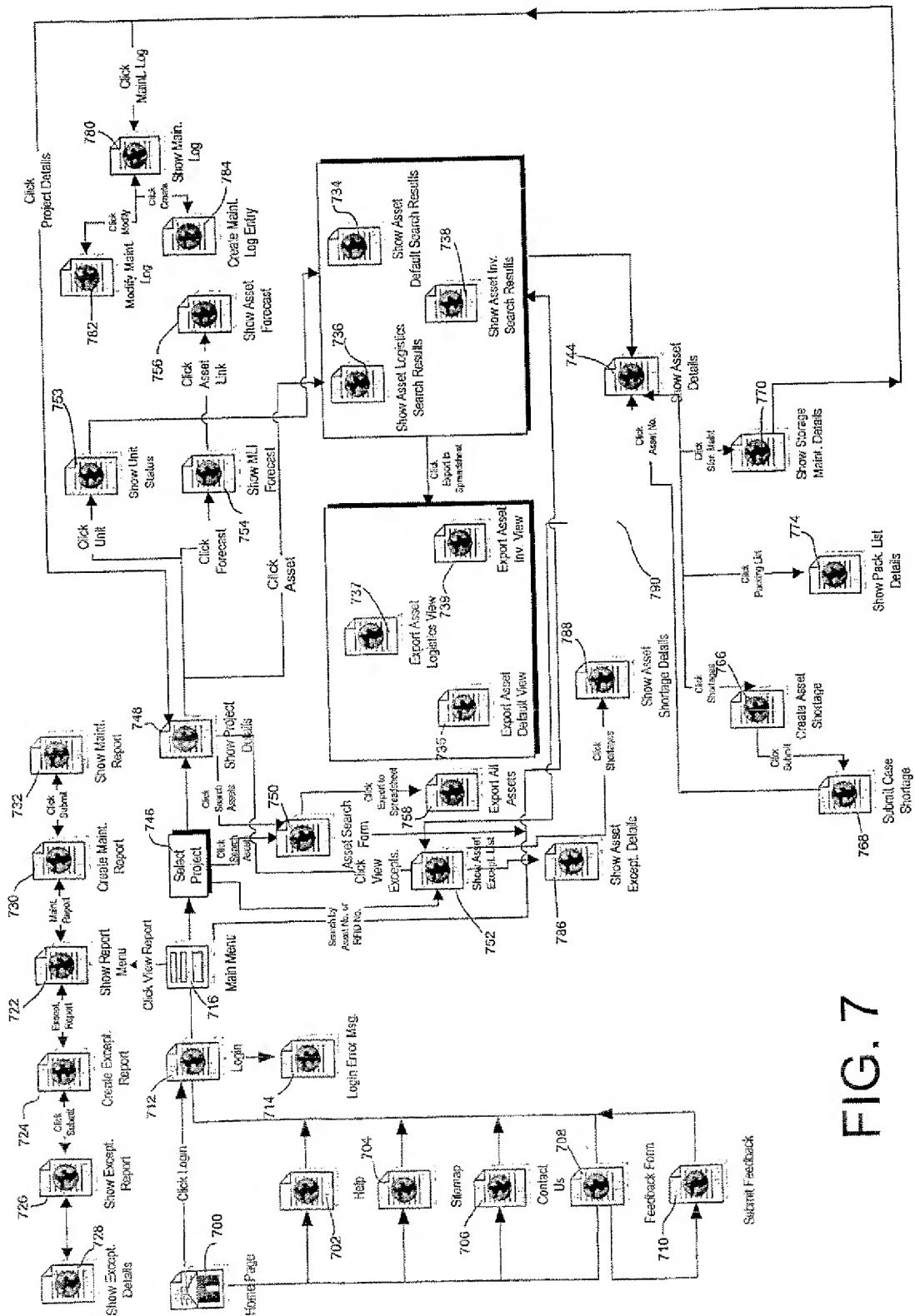
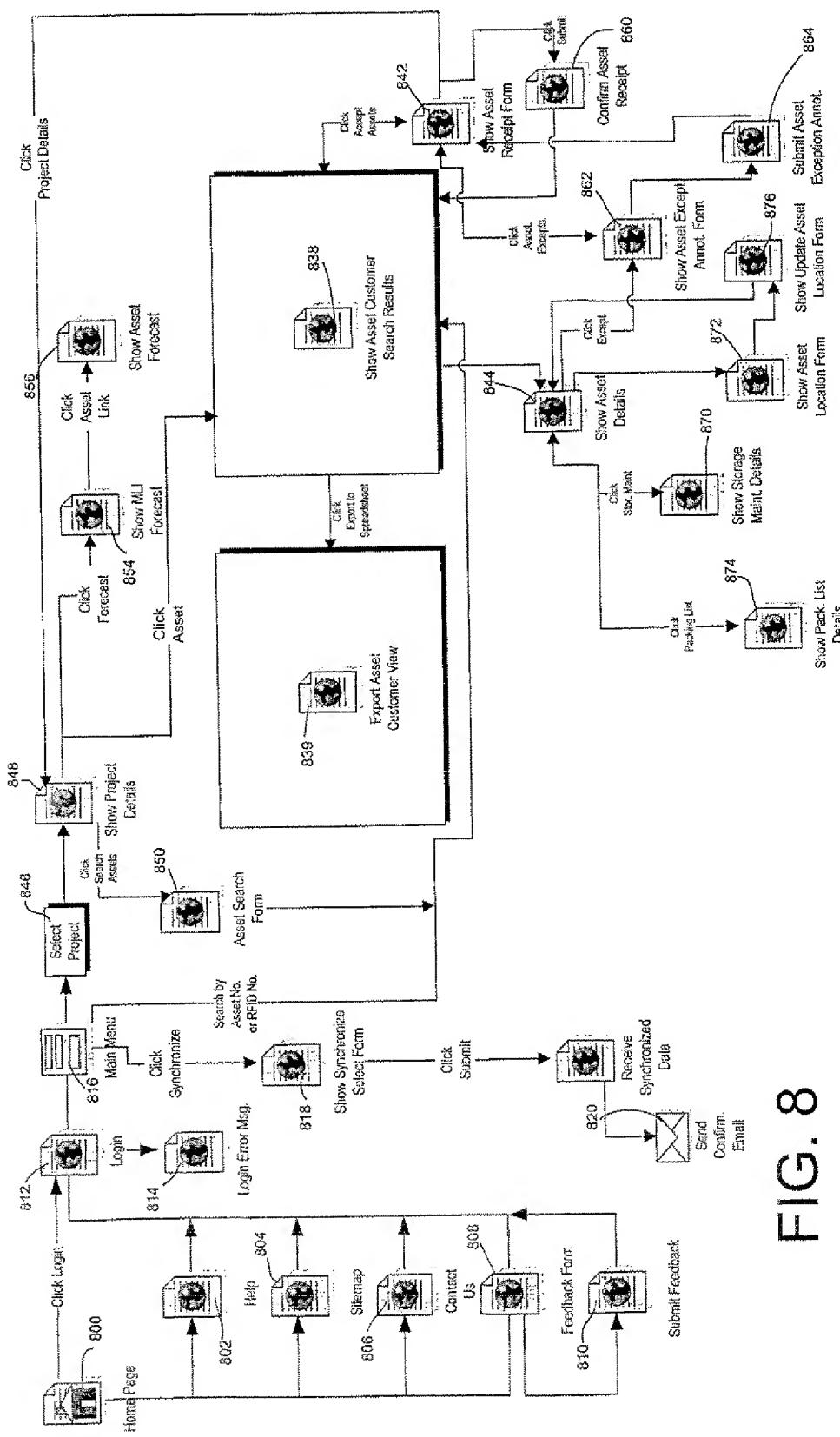
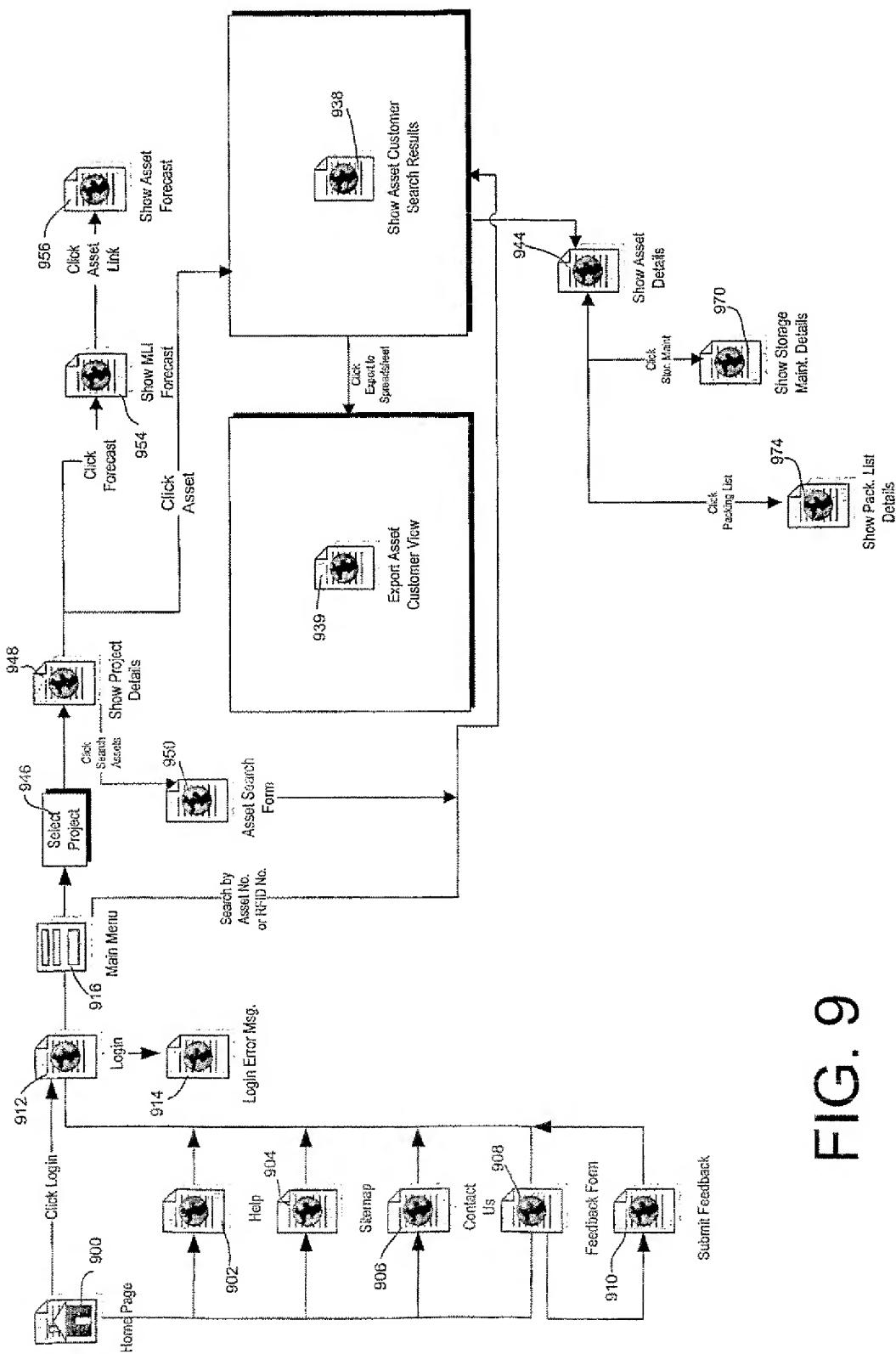


FIG. 7



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6
FIG.
E

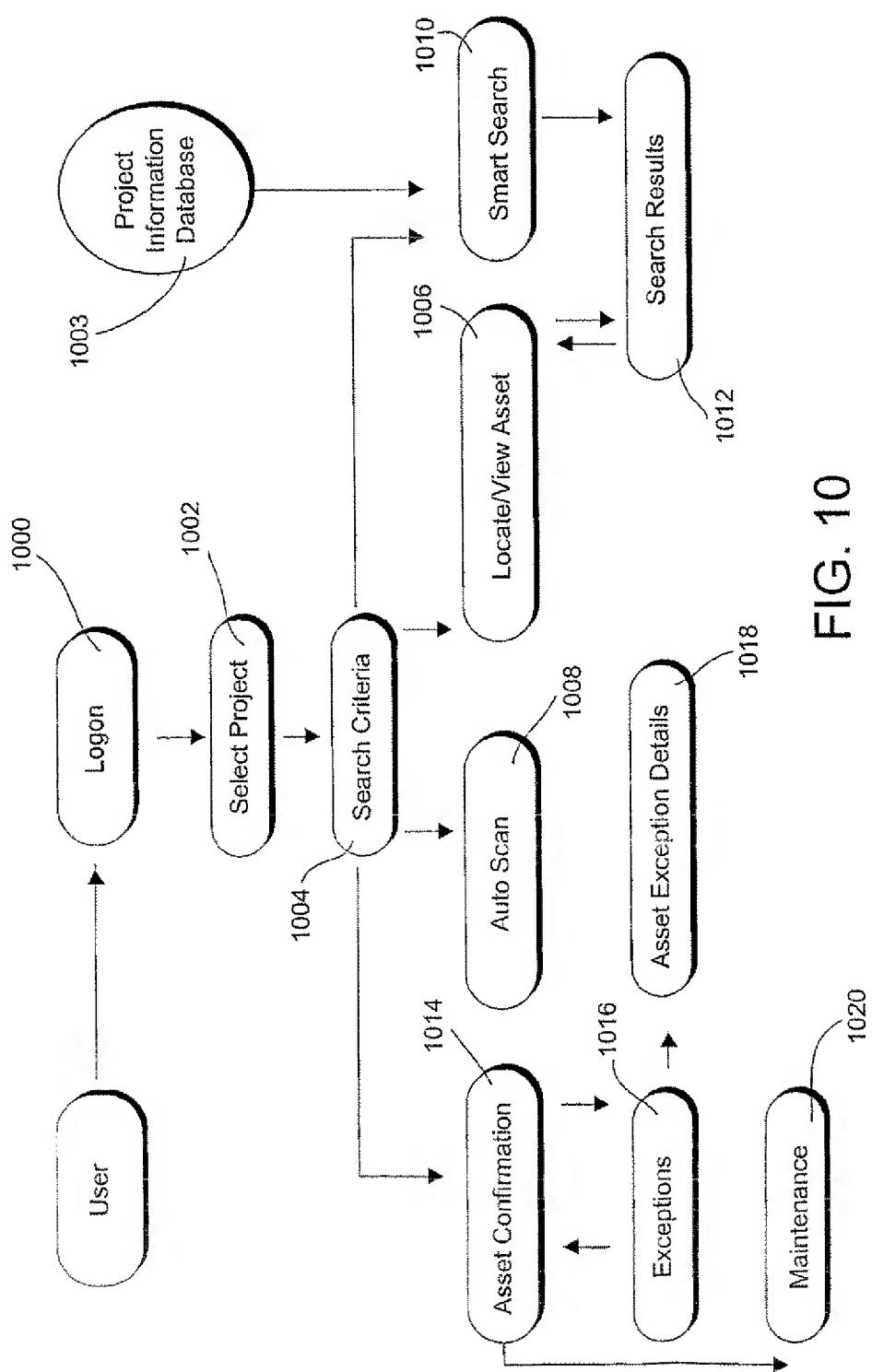


FIG. 10

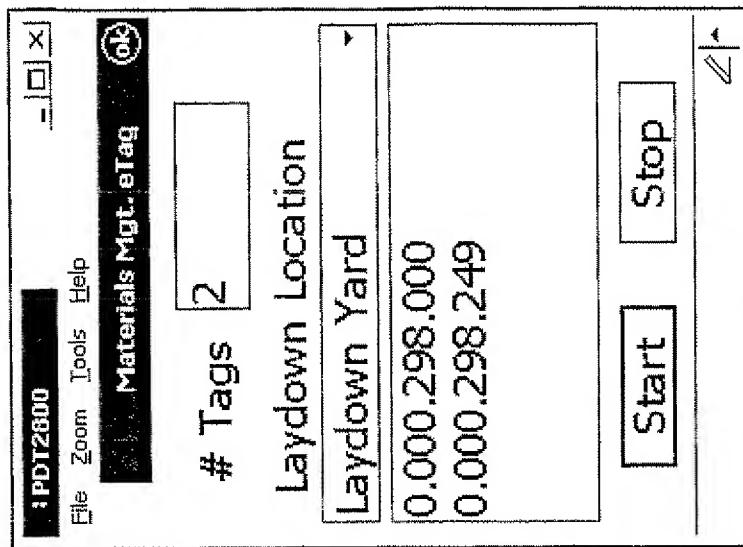


FIG. 12

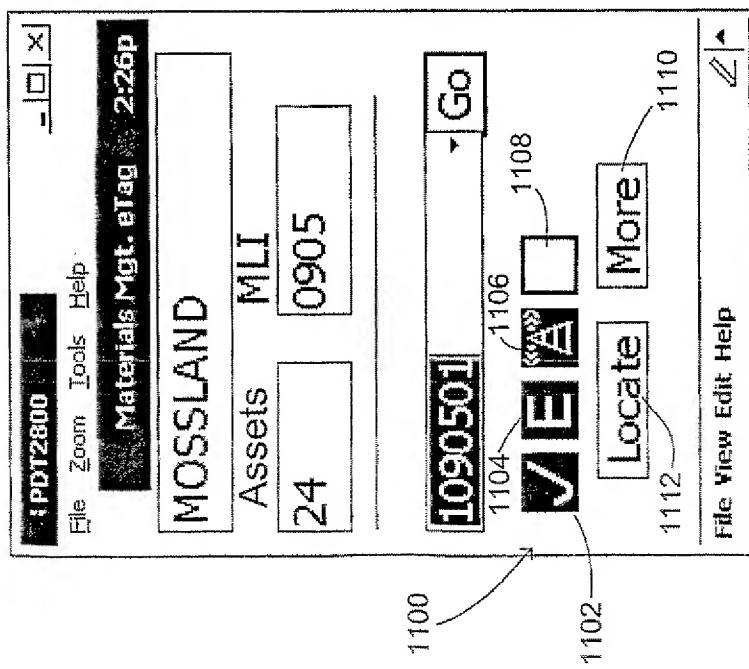


FIG. 11

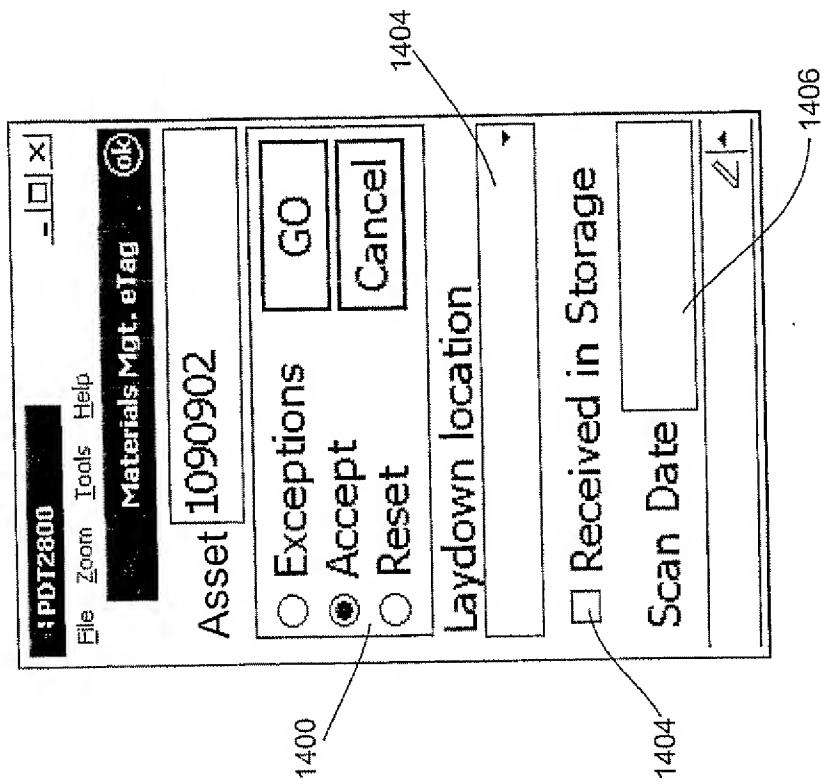


FIG. 14

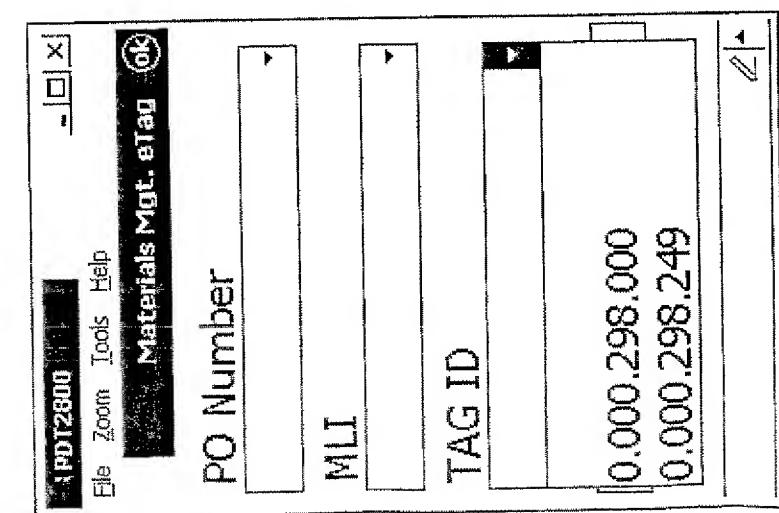


FIG. 13

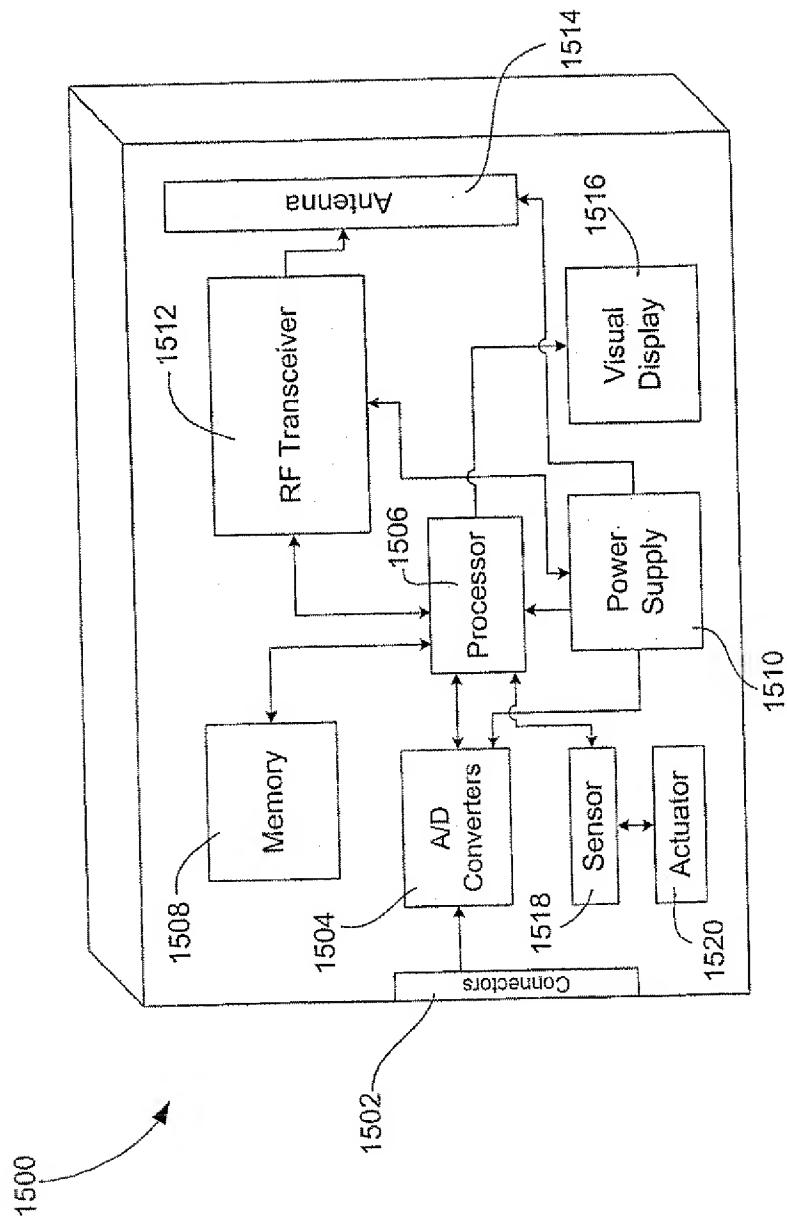


FIG. 15

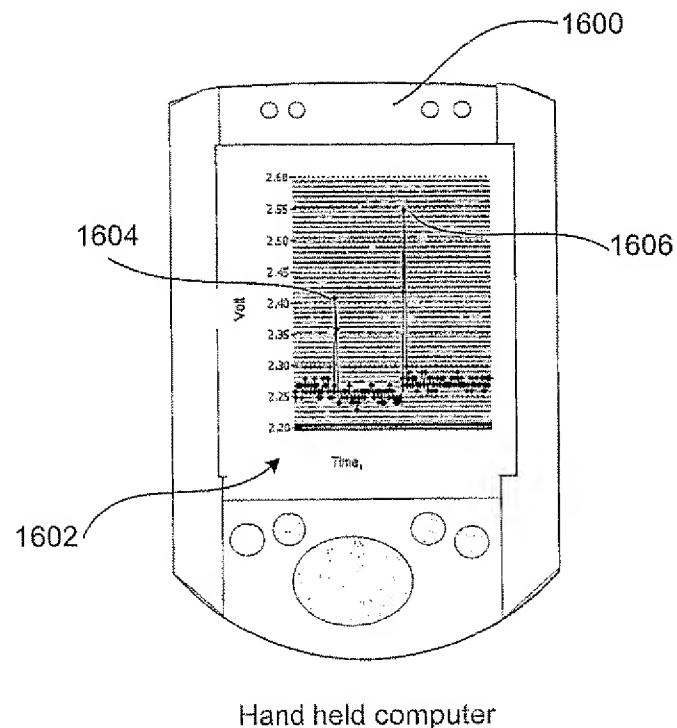
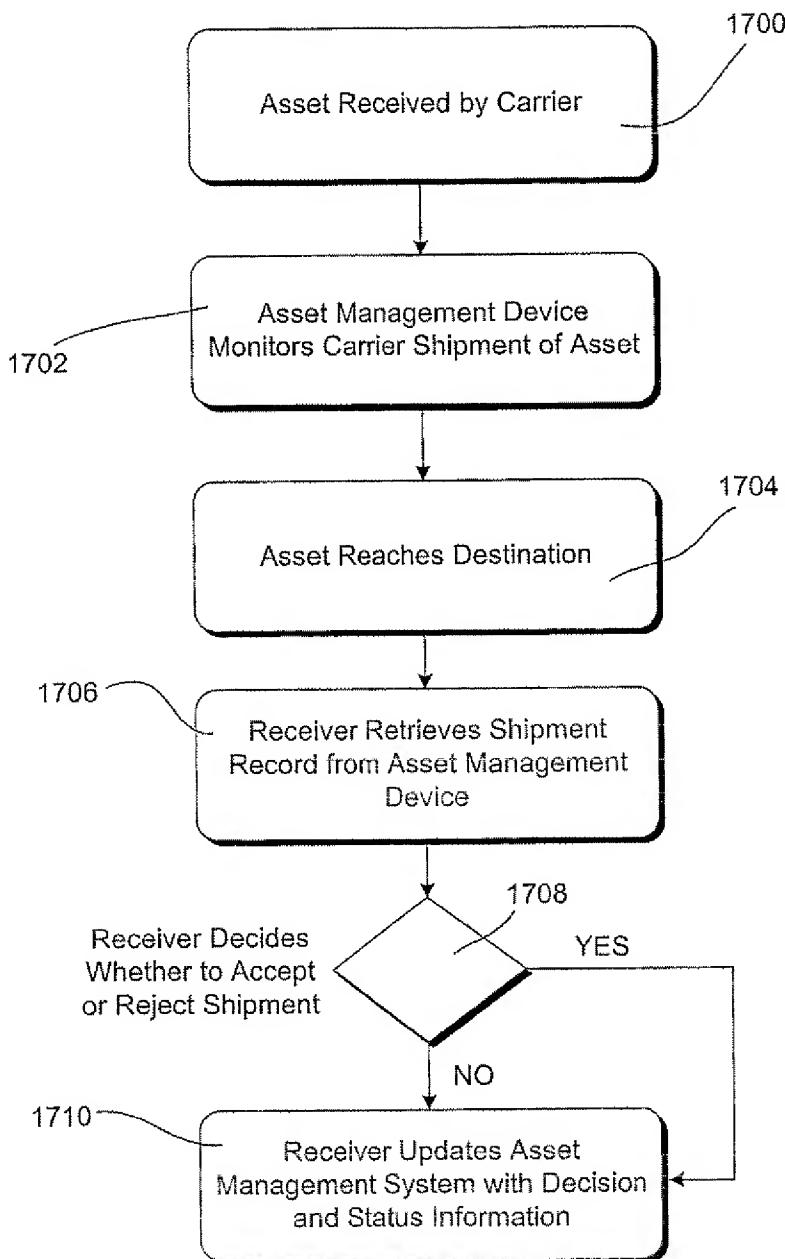


FIG. 16

FIG. 17



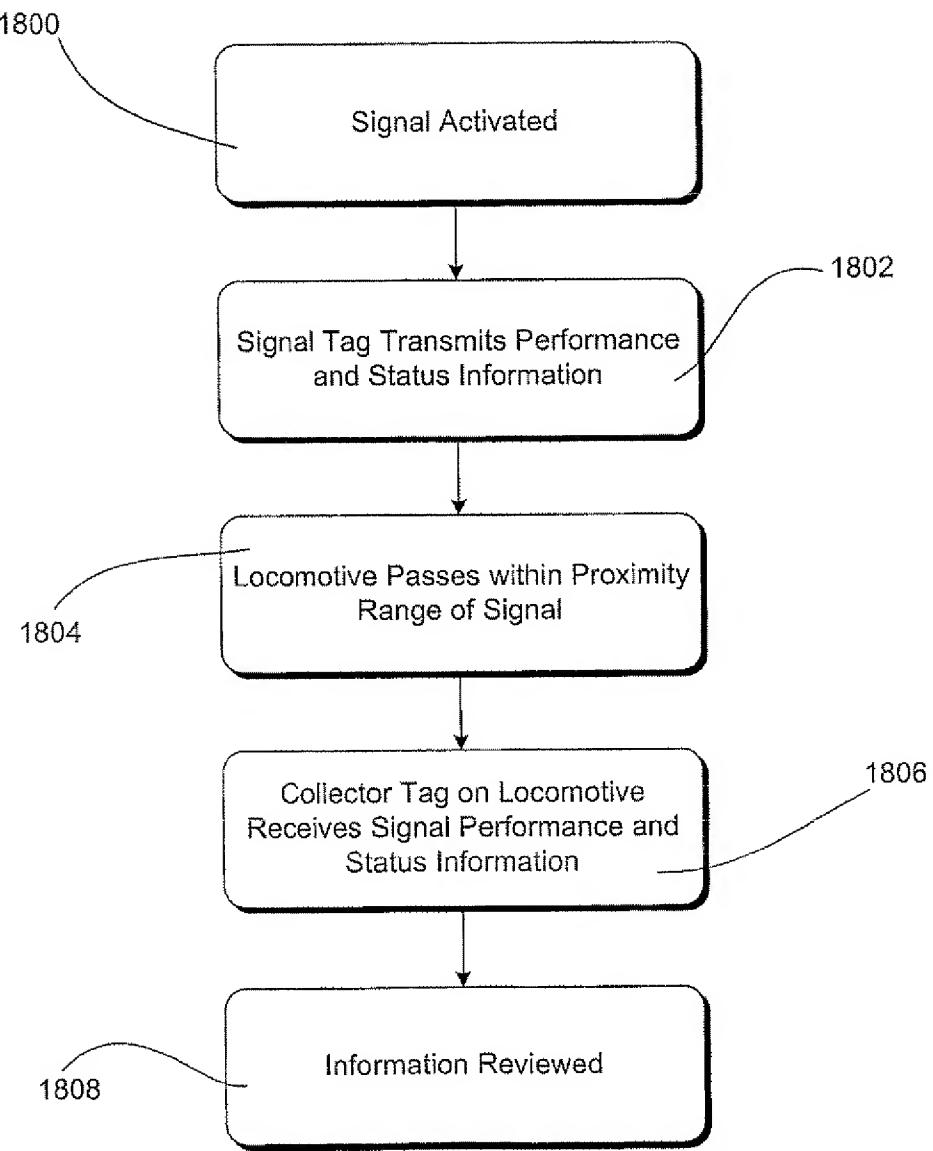
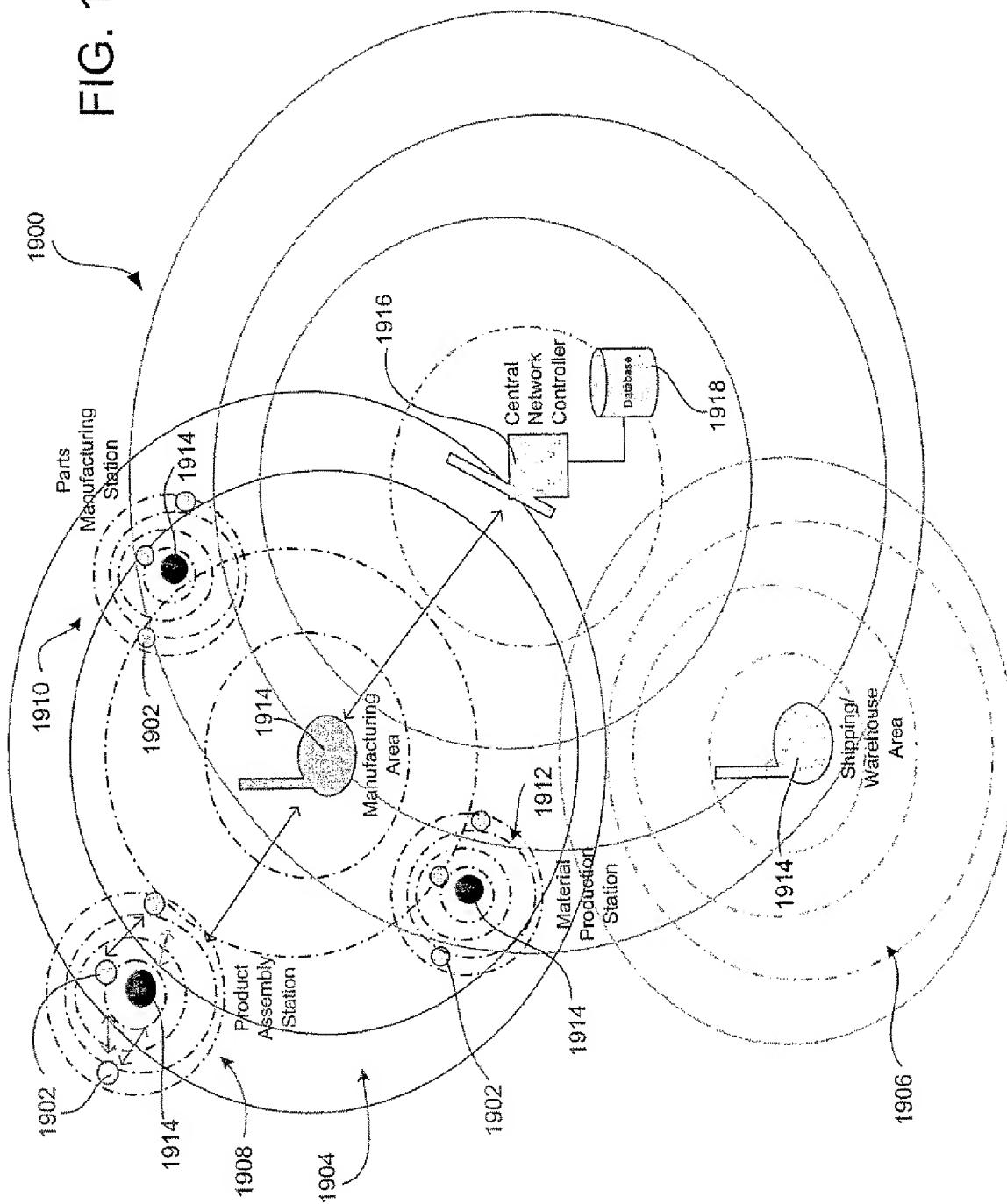


FIG. 18

FIG. 19



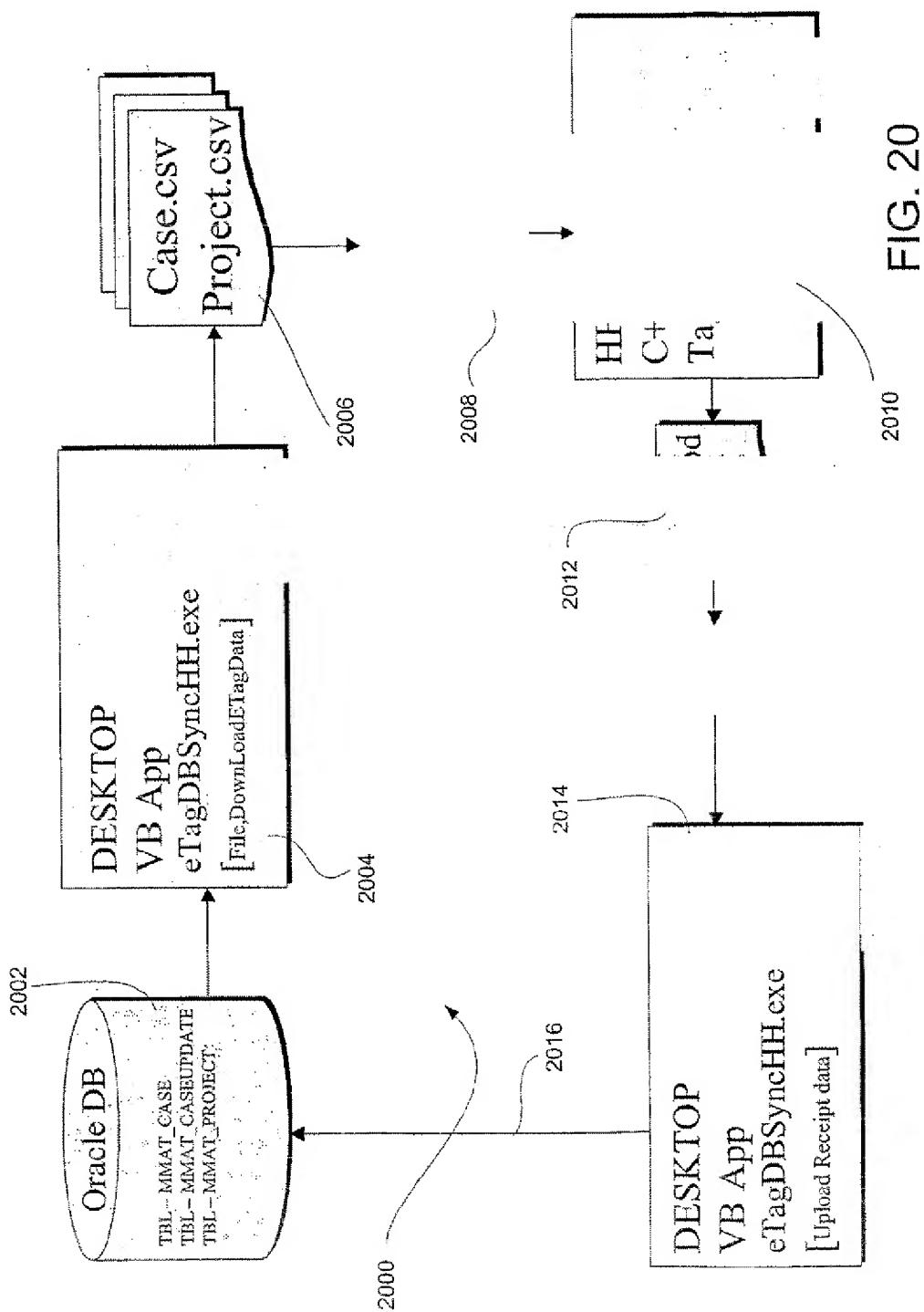


FIG. 21

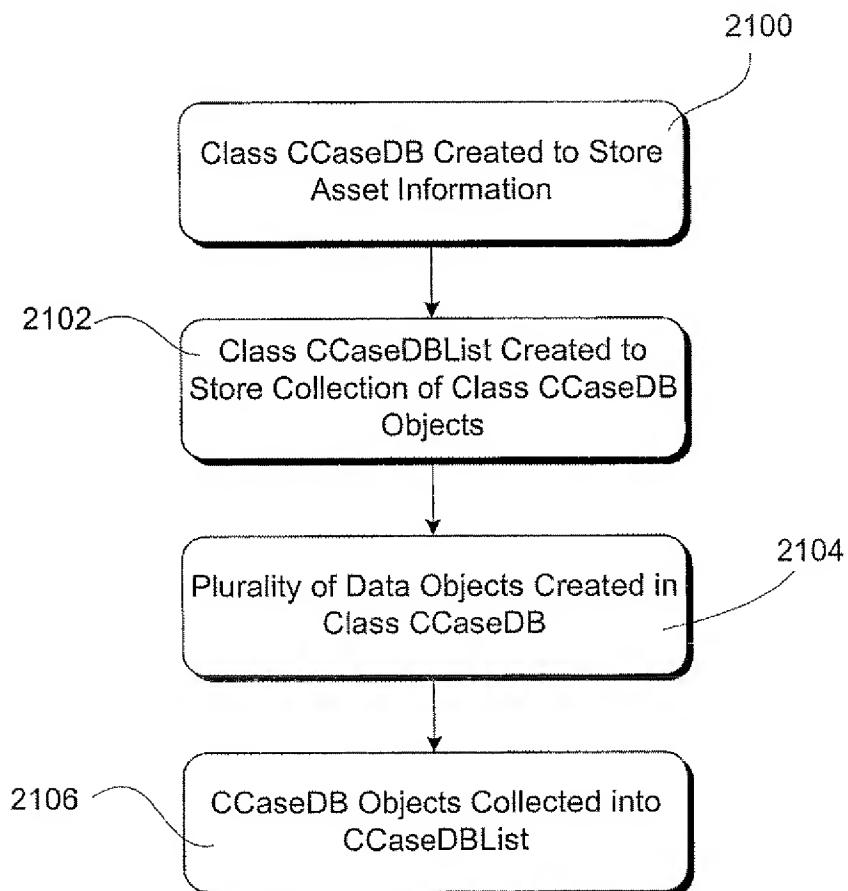
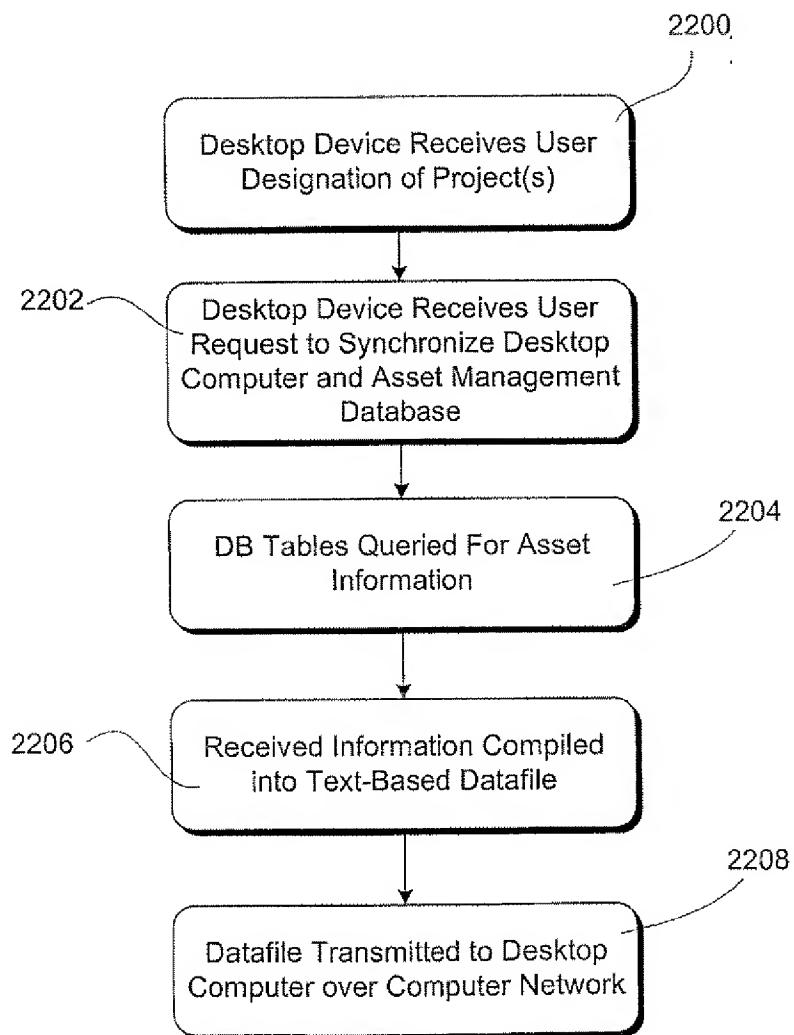


FIG. 22



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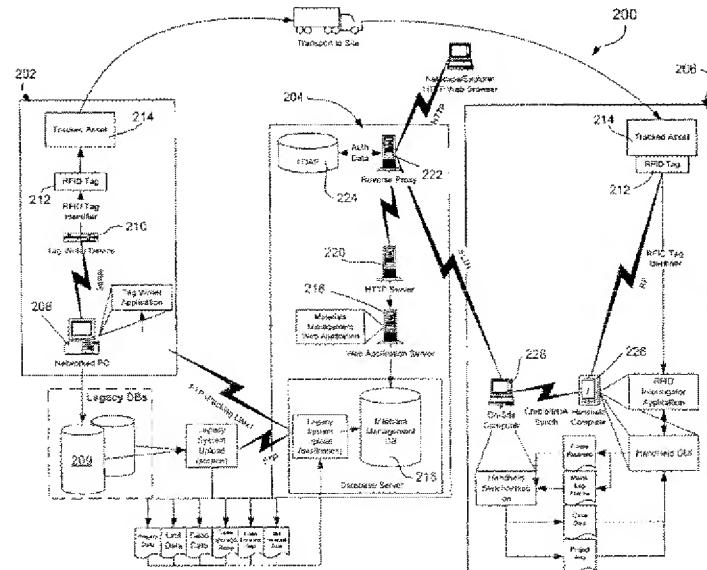
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Published:
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TRACKING CAPABILITIES



(57) Abstract: A method and system (100) for managing both bulk and non-bulk material and assets using radio frequency (RF) identification devices. In particular, the process manages items shipped from businesses and third parties to customers. The system includes an electronic asset identification device such as RFID tag (212), a central data repository (216), and a mobile computing environment. Personnel may access the system via the Internet and thus determine shipment status.

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 US CL : 705/22, 28, 700/216, 229; 340/572.1

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
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Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A,T	US 6,614,349 B1 (PROCTOR et al) 02 September 2003 (02.09.2003), see entire document.	1-20
A	US 6,304,186 B1 (RABANNE et al) 16 October 2001 (16.10.2001), see entire document.	1-20
A	US 6,249,227 B1 (BRADY et al) 19 June 2001 (19.06.2001), see entire document.	1-20
A	US 6,144,301 A (FRIEDEM) 7 November 2000 (07.11.2000), see entire document.	1-20
A	US 5,949,335 A (MAYNARD) 7 September 1999 (07.09.1999), see entire document.	1-20
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